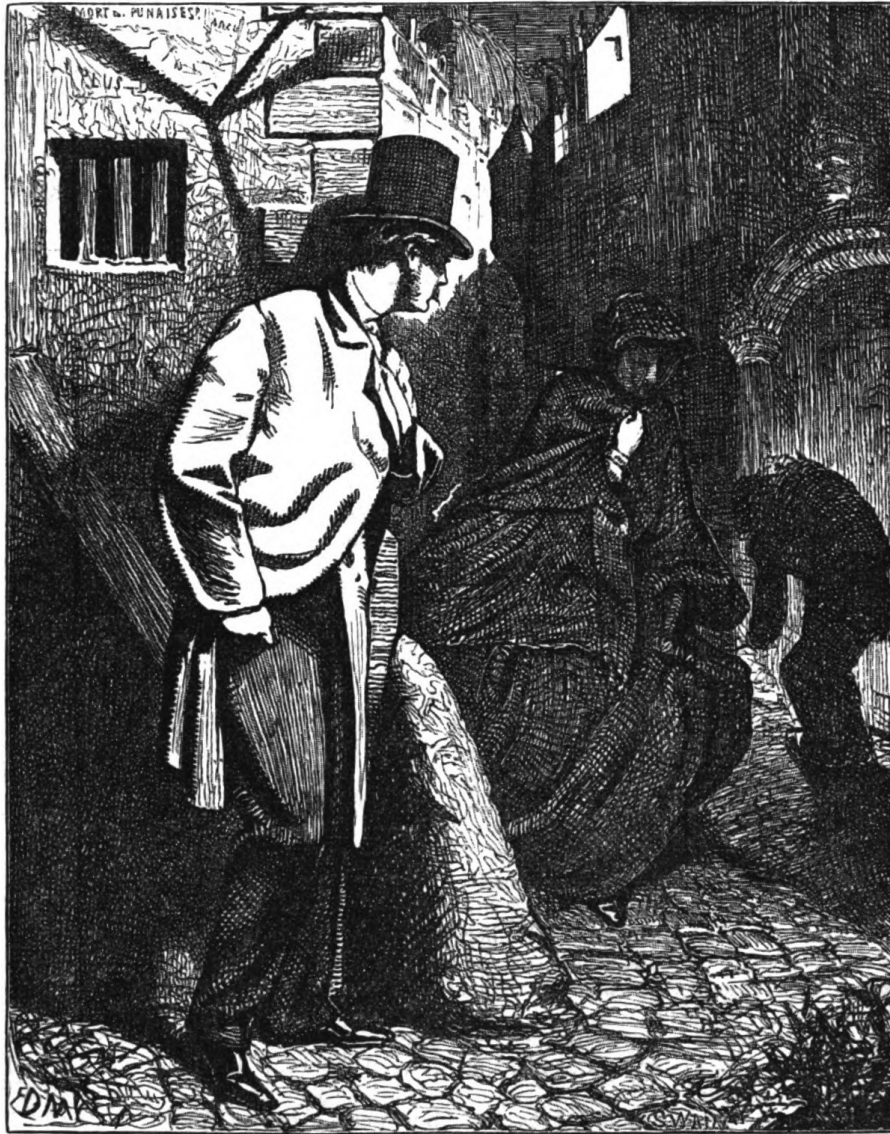


SANTA; OR, A WOMAN'S TRAGEDY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "AGNES TREMORNE," &c.



CHAPTER I.

I HAD been for two or three months a regular guest at Madame de L——'s weekly concerts. She was a Russian, and assembled at her house the most distinguished foreigners who were in Paris. It was a privilege, therefore, for an undistinguished Englishman to be admitted there. She had known my father, and for the sake of "Auld Lang Syne" was most kind and courteous to me.

Soon after I first went to her house, I was much struck with the appearance of a lady whom I rarely met anywhere else in Paris. She seemed attracted by the music (certainly the best of its kind which could be heard in this Paradise of Artists, even more than of women), for she entered as the first notes of the orchestra sounded, and before the last echoes had died away she was gone.

She was the Countess Rabenfels, the widow, as

it was generally supposed, of a former Austrian minister in Rome. I had been presented to her, and we had exchanged a few words, but there was an indescribable something about this lady which was an effectual barrier to all attempts on my part to improve our acquaintance. An indifference scarcely veiled by a kind of negligent politeness, which was, to say the least of it, discouraging. She attracted, and yet repelled. In society, to be above or beyond the ordinary level is not an advantage, and Madame Rabenfels was not popular. I was not surprised at it. Amongst the pretty faces and conventional smiles around, the aspect of this lady was as incongruous as that of a Greek Muse would be among Dresden china shepherdesses.

She was usually plainly but richly dressed. She wore few ornaments, and I noticed that the arrangements of her dress, though graceful, were

utterly devoid of all coquetry. Her bright hair, of that tint so familiar to us in Venetian pictures (yellow with a flame through it, like rare, burnished gold), was simply folded back from her broad forehead, and drooped low down on her neck. The dark eyes were deep set, and wide apart, and there was a peculiar slowness in their movements, which gave an air of thoughtfulness, perhaps almost of sternness, to their expression. She was pale, and there were lines on her forehead, and under her eyes, which told of long suffering. But though the upper part of the face looked worn, the mouth, with its beautiful, flexible lips of rich dewy red, and the radiant teeth, which shone luminous as she smiled, was as bright as in the freshest bloom of youth. It was certainly a striking countenance. Larger thoughts, nobler purposes, deeper feelings might be read in it, than in those of the triflers around. This discrepancy was felt by all, and resented by some. All saw there was a difference; the few only acknowledged this difference a distinction.

One evening, I was as usual at *Madame de L.*'s. I had just entered, and was standing near *Madame Rabenfels*. She put out her hand to take an ice from the servant, and in so doing, some pressure of the crowd caused him to stumble, and upset the ices and tumblers into her lap. I rescued her from the broken glasses, but her dress seemed considerably damaged. She thanked me with her usual air of grave indifference, and rose to go. I offered her my arm. On reaching the entrance we found her carriage had not yet arrived. I proposed returning to the music-room. It was yet early, the clocks were only just striking twelve. She hesitated, and then with more impulsiveness than I had yet seen in her, said:

"I have an engagement, and must go; but I will draw my hood over my head, and I can easily walk the little distance. Good night," and she offered to shake hands. I smiled, and told her she must have a strange opinion of me, if she imagined I would not request permission to accompany her.

"Thank you," she answered gravely; "it is scarcely necessary, for in ten minutes I shall be at home; however, as you will."

Coldly as the permission was granted, I availed myself of it and walked with her.

It was a beautiful night, and Paris proper, as it might be termed, sparkled in the distance, while the dark trees of the *Champs Elysées* looked shadowy and gloomy near us. The roll of carriages, and that indescribable noise which surges through the night in a great city like Paris, was very striking, contrasted with the distinct fall of our own footsteps. The silence and the darkness near us, the glitter and the reverberations beyond us, had a mysterious, ominous effect. We seemed walking in some weird and enchanted world, cut off and separated from the real one by those busy echoes, and those bands of light.

"Do you not think," I remarked, "that those lamps, in their tortuous and undulating lines, look like the convolutions of some huge shining serpent, intent on barring our further progress?"

"More like the bright nails which are disposed in lines and curves on some vast black coffin spread

out before us," she answered, and we both smiled at our somewhat far-fetched and gloomy comparisons.

"I feel almost superstitious," she continued, "when I look at these silent, shining witnesses of all the deeds of the night. The stars are too far above our sphere for us to claim their sympathy; but these are in the midst of all, and are a part of all, and yet are as completely removed from all, as the stars themselves."

"Exactly so, and it is one of my pleasures to walk sometimes late at night, or rather early in the morning, here, and watch the distant lights, and wonder what scenes are being acted in the great drama of life before their steadfast, ruthless presence."

"But here, we are both too near and too far from the great throbbing heart of the fair wicked city for true observation."

"Why do you think so?"

"There is something so mournful and so depressing in being cut off, as it were, from the joys and sorrows of the multitude," she answered, sadly, "that we cannot judge fairly when thus separated from them."

"It is but like the lives of many of us," I replied. "To some are given the wide sympathies, the broad lights of life; to others the silence and the shade, with only the echoes of one footstep sounding through their darkened existence."

She paused abruptly. Whether she was satisfied on reflection that I meant no personal allusion in what I said, I know not; but, after a minute or two, she went on in a lighter tone:

"This late walk in evening dress reminds me of such happy days! When a young girl in Rome, I always returned on foot from any little evening gaieties to which I went. My brother, though much older than myself, humoured me in all my whims and fancies. We would hasten through the streets till we entered the little side door which opened upon the great court-yard, and then we raced to see which could reach first, the fountain, that tossed up its sparkles in the moonlight. How many sprays of the fern which hung over it have I held up in token of victory! for I used always to win *then*." A lovely smile hovered for a moment over her lips.

"You are a Roman?"

"I am a Colonna," she answered. There was a simple dignity in her tone which suited her well, and the picture her words had created of the two Italians, one so beautiful, and both in the bloom of youth,—of the sky of Rome with its intense moonlight,—of the fountain garlanded with fern, such as I had often seen in my wanderings in the old city, was charming.

Hitherto my conversations with her had been brief; the general tone of her serious and anti-mundane remarks had excited my profane discontent or my irreverent impatience, but now I was deeply interested. We had reached her house. She thanked me politely, bade me farewell kindly, and the door closed upon her.

I stood for a moment, in deep thought, when I felt my arm touched, and saw my friend *Auguste Rochecalme*.

"I congratulate you, *mon cher*."

Why did these words sting me? I laughed out loud as I answered, "Why, Auguste?"

"You have achieved an intimacy which we all covet." He laid an insolent stress on the word intimacy.

I was a vile coward to allow such words to be uttered in my presence. Does an evil spirit enter into us at times, that thus, without cause or provocation, we belie our own hearts, and all but sanction the foul trifling words which sully that which ought to be sacred, and is in truth sacred in our own eyes? My companion looked hard at me and went on:

"You escorted Madame Rabenfels from Madame de L——'s. I observed that you left together, and I find you at her door after midnight."

"You must have done me the honour to watch me pretty closely."

"I am interested in that lady."

I winced, and looked at my companion from head to foot as he went on. "I have long admired her, and there is a mystery about her which is piquant. She ought to be a facile conquest, if all be true that I have heard of her. Indeed, I have myself witnessed strange things in her mode of life."

The exquisite pain these words gave me were the fitting punishment for my disgraceful complicity in his impertinence a few minutes before. He continued: "You and I are such old friends, Seymour, that I don't mind making you my father confessor. My engagements have sometimes led me at a late hour near one of the worst localities of this very naughty city. Invariably I have seen, myself unseen, this lady leave at about three or later in the morning one of the houses in the Rue du Puits. One day I had the meanness, or what you will, to go to the house, and by a small donation to the porter, heard that a lady visited almost daily, or rather nightly, a young man who lodged in one of the rooms. His name I have forgotten. He was in bad health, and very poor. He had lived there for a few months in the strictest retirement, and with the closest economy. His only visible means of subsistence was authorship, and he wrote almost day and night. Some time ago he met with an accident, was run over or knocked down—*quesais-je?*—and was brought home by this lady in a *fiacre*. She did not leave him for three entire days. Since then she has constantly been to see him, and has arranged everything for his comfort."

"Surely," I said, "a woman can be charitable without exposing herself to such injurious comments? She *may* belong to some religious order."

"Charity can be exercised by day, or dispensed by a servant. Besides, my informant, who seemed resolved to give me my money's worth, entered into details. He had heard the man call the lady by her Christian name, and one night, in preparing a room (*so he said*), which opened upon that occupied by the young man, he had heard voices raised so high that, though he could not understand the words (for they spoke in Italian), he could comprehend by the tones, that the lady was imploring some favour which her companion was angrily refusing. In some occult manner he also discovered that she was in a convulsion of grief, and had thrown herself on her knees. I dare say

some of this information was false. He no doubt wished to excite me sufficiently to come again and pay for more of his news. But there was verisimilitude in it. Our fair friend has something tragic in her mien. One of those women who take things so terribly in earnest, and who are not contented with the surface of things, as most of their dear sex are. The worst kind of women to have to deal with in any relation whatever," said he sententiously.

Poor women, we complain of your frivolity, and if we meet with one who appears to possess some depth of character or reality of purpose, she becomes more surely a victim from those very qualities.

"This is no longer the age for tragedy," said Auguste; "life has become a comedy, a sentimental comedy if you will, but there are no parts now for your *Heloïsas* or your *Saint Theresas*."

He might have gone on for an hour; all the time he spoke, and though every word was distinctly audible to me, a vision rose before me of a noble head, a clear, frank, lofty look, and an aspect so entirely the reverse of anything undisciplined or unprincipled that it seemed to be treason to listen to him.

"What are you thinking of? Have you no remark to make upon my revelations?"

"What reply would you have? It would take too long to sift the truth from the falsehood in this romantic story, and what does it matter to me?"

"Pshaw! I have seen you hover perpetually about her for the last three months. You admire her; so do I; so do we all; but there is a hitch somewhere. There is something about her which jars with her surroundings. Some go so far as to say she is not a widow, that her husband is still alive, but that she has been separated from him for years."

"Who says so?"

"Some countrymen of hers. The name of Rabenfels, however, belongs to such a large Austrian clan, if I may so call it, that they may have been mistaken. Yet you must confess there is a mystery about her."

"I confess nothing of the kind."

"But I should say," he went on, without noticing my interruption, "that her appearance belies the scandal. Her air is so frankly independent, so quietly distinguished. A manner which is not fluttered and defiant, like that of most women in that equivocal position, but calm and self-relying. A woman separated from her husband, as things are at present, is at once in an antagonistic relation to society. It requires more consummate tact than most women are gifted with, it needs less impulsiveness than they usually possess, to steer safely through all their difficulties. This is why so few separated women keep their position in society: they almost all sink into the *demi-monde*."

"Is that the fault of women, or the fault of society?"

"I think it would take us too long to discuss that question, I *against* women and *for* society; you *for* women and *against* society. Hitherto Madame Rabenfels has lived so quietly, and being so rich, the world expects so much from her power

of contributing to its pleasures and amusements, that she has not yet been ostracised. I was told that her husband and herself were separated after two years of marriage; he is much older than she is, and some extraordinary tales are told of the admiration of an exalted personage at Vienna; but why this should have caused a separation is not explained. There is a long gap, too, between her leaving Vienna and her arrival in Paris. Here, musicians, painters, and authors are her only associates; but even these she sees rarely. Still, the devil's advocate would obtain her non-canonisation, from a general unsaintly look about her and her belongings, and something revolutionary and strong-minded in her opinions; and then this episode of the Rue du Puits is damning in my opinion. If not married, why not see this man openly. I believe she *is* married."

"Excuse me," I said, "but I have an engagement. I cannot listen to your *chronique scandaleuse* any more."

Why had I done so for so long? We parted, and I walked on with the buzz of those infamous words in my ears.

How strange is the heart of man! I had met this woman repeatedly, and admired her vaguely; much of what I had heard this evening I had heard in fragments before; nothing was absolutely new; and yet because I had walked a few hundred yards with her and heard her speak of the past, there was a feeling of appropriation towards her, which made my temples throb and my heart beat, at this light mention of her name.

I felt fevered and excited, and instead of going home, walked about for the next two hours, scarcely attending to where I went, till, on looking up, I found myself not far from the street mentioned by Auguste. I heard the clocks strike two, and an irresistible impulse led me to the spot mentioned by him. The streets in this neighbourhood, one of the worst in Paris, are filthy, narrow, and dark, and are reported to be dangerous. I thought of nothing, and though I was once hustled and pressed on by two men, I got free and went on. As I passed the centre house, the door opened and a woman issued from it. She went swiftly onwards, without turning to the right or the left. She was plainly dressed in black, and her veil was drawn close down. It was my instinct alone which told me it was Madame Rabenfels, for in nothing could she have been recognised except perhaps by a certain swiftness and lightness of tread, which I had noticed as we walked together a few hours ago.

A step has to me much significance. I can judge of a character by the sound of a step. I can distinguish a race by the manner in which an individual treads. I can estimate the health and temper of a person by observing his walk.

I reached her as she came under the light of a lamp. Still I could not see her face. I passed on and then turned back and repassed her. I looked at her earnestly and saw her start. An impulse, which I restrained, made me step forward as if to speak, but she quickened her pace, and again repassed me. We proceeded thus—I following, she a little in advance—for nearly half

an hour. I could not break the spell. I knew not whether she was conscious of it or not, but she drew me as a mesmeriser draws a magnetic patient. At last we entered a street into which one side of her house opened. She drew out a key and opened a small garden door. There to my astonishment she paused for a moment, turned round, threw up her veil, and walked up to me; her grave, earnest eyes flashed upon me, as she bowed haughtily, and with freezing contempt said:

"Be satisfied, Mr. Seymour, the woman you have been insulting by this espionage is the Countess Rabenfels."

In another minute she was gone.

I was stung to the heart. I could have knelt at her feet. I could have submitted to any chastisement by way of atonement. Such were my thoughts that night as I paced my room. Night is the Egeria to us all. Our best selves come out beneath its influence and counsel. In the teeth of the reports I had heard, in spite of what I had myself seen, I could have attested, at the price of my own, the honour which I had so cruelly doubted.

But alas! the morning comes. The work-a-day world awakes, and we are at once placed in contact with the Prince of the Air and his evil angels. We become suspicious, cynical, and hard. I rose with the most unjustifiable anger against my species in general, against women in particular. Yet, as I argued with myself, what was it all to me? But when did such questions avail?

I went out more than usual. I scorned myself for feeling wounded by the actions of a comparative stranger. I could not shake it off. True, the javelin had been thrown by a stranger's hand, but the flesh was torn and bled. Pain roused memory, and the memory of pain received and given is a strong tie. I noted this as about a week afterwards I met the Countess Rabenfels again at Madame de L——'s.

I felt I blushed as I met her glance. She looked much as usual, but a flash of the eye, a dilatation of the nostrils told me that she, too, was sensible of a link between us.

I listened to the music as it rose and fell. There is a bitter sweetness in the effect of music at times. We may attach our own meaning and interpretation to it, but to me at least there is often a vague sense of unfulfilled promise in it. It suggests "infinite passion," but with it also

The pain
Of finite hearts that yearn.

The mortal ear is ravished with the heard melody, but it longs with a tender transport for some yet more divinely harmonious song of which it is only the type.

The rooms were very crowded and the pressure of the throng brought me suddenly exactly behind the seat occupied by Madame Rabenfels.

"How perfect the music has been to-night," I said to her.

"Perfect in itself, but to me there is always imperfection in music."

I started, as she thus echoed my own thoughts.

"It is not so much the case in vocal music; the voice and passion of the singer give individuality,

and limit it at once to the finite, and within that limit we can be entirely satisfied. But the absolute concord of perfectly wrought instruments, and the perfect beauty of the compositions they utter, rouse in us a burning sense of the infinite which cannot be assuaged."

"I agree with you," I said.

I thought she sighed. We were silent. The ghost of the evening in the Rue du Puits rose between us. As I stood so near her, I could observe that tremulous movement in the throat which is the sure sign of suppressed emotion among women. The face remains calm, the eyes cold, the mouth even is still, but they cannot silence this treacherous pulse.

At this moment some one passed me, and whispered in a mocking, stage whisper :

"Remember No. 9, Rue du Puits."

I turned and saw the laughing face of Auguste. She heard him also. She looked at him, and then full in my face. It flashed upon me that she thought I had betrayed her secret to this worldly trifier. What steadfast questioning in her eyes! No reproach, but a kind of mournful wonder, a sense of undeserved wrong, a perception of unexpected baseness. My eyes fell. But the fiend within me had been roused, and was not to be thus appeased.

"By-the-bye," I said, "will you allow me to assume the privileges of a native, counselling a stranger upon the usages of his country? I have lived in Paris so long that I know it well. You should not enter the street in which I met you some nights ago." (She started.) "There are all kinds of dangers in it. No one should enforce such an obligation upon you."

She turned white to the lips, but I went on.

"There are all kinds of dangers——"

"For me there are no dangers."

"Dangers to the purse, the life——"

"Go on."

"The reputation of those seen in it. But I suppose you are unacquainted with its character, and passed through it accidentally?"

I became confused. My impertinence, excited by a kind of blind revenge for the pain I had suffered and was suffering, was not natural to me, and I used the weapon awkwardly, and possibly gave more pain than even in that moment of resentment I intended.

"You are mistaken," she said quietly, and rose from her seat. "I know the street well: I go there constantly: I go to-night again." And with superb disdain she bowed and left me.

Again was I foiled. What a fool I had been! And how each blow I aimed at her recoiled upon myself. The ground seemed to become suddenly hot beneath my feet, and I too left the room.

(To be continued.)

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CHAPTER II.

I DID not again meet Madame Rabenfels. She did not make her appearance the following week at Madame de L——'s. I was restless and unhappy. A longing I could not control would take me to the door of her house, and then when I came in sight of it, a recoil equally strong would oblige me to leave it. I resolutely avoided Auguste. I did not confess to myself that I was in love. I only acknowledged the interest we all feel in one we have wronged and misjudged. I had besides a mystic feeling that our acquaintance would not terminate thus, that our fates were in some way connected. In many ways the name of Madame Rabenfels reached me, and generally with some disparaging remark. Sometimes, however, with enthusiastic praise. Some persons denied indignantly the truth of the reports about her, others in the most unqualified manner classed her with the many unfortunate women placed in an equivocal position from the mere fact of being separated from their husbands. Strangely enough, however, these allusions were

to the past life: the present seemed ignored by all but Auguste.

I knew she continued her visits to the Rue du Puits. I often waited for her near her own house, or rather near the garden entrance. I felt happier when I had seen the door close upon her. She was safe. Yet was it torture to me. The hours I spent thus waiting for her were the bitterest of my life. Regret, jealousy, sorrow, compassion, agitated me by turns. I had also a sense through all of my own impotence to throw off the yoke which I bore, though it galled my very heart-strings, or to be of the slightest use or consolation to her whatever the grief she endured—and this was very hard to bear.

A week or two passed, and I began to realise through all this suffering the hold this affection had upon me.

One night, or rather morning, I was standing a few yards from her door. I saw her advancing with a slower step than usual. She paused for a moment and leaned against the door before opening it, as if giving herself time for thought, or to

recover herself after some overpowering emotion. She clasped her hands together with a gesture of passionate sorrow, and then entered. After the door had closed I was moving onwards when my attention was attracted by something glittering on the ground. I picked it up. It was a bracelet. I went to one of the lamps and held it up to the light. It was an old-fashioned silver chain. It was clasped by a cross, anchor, and heart entwined together. On these was written in large letters,—“Volere,” “Sapere,” “Ardire.” On the anchor, in pearls, “Volere;” on the cross, in sapphires, “Sapere;” on the heart, in carbuncles, “Ardire.” “To know, to will, to dare.” “I will dare,” I said to myself, and went to the door. Before I could look about for a bell to ring, or a fastening to undo, it suddenly opened, and Madame Rabenfels stood before me.

“My bracelet!” she exclaimed.

I put it into her hand.

“You do not know how you have served me,” she said. “This is a talisman; but how did you know it was mine?”

I felt that I crimsoned to the very temples.

“I have observed it on your arm—I was passing—”

We were standing near the door of the garden. At that moment a quick step ran up the path, and a woman servant rushed up to us and spoke to her mistress in Italian. She was evidently the bearer of some important and unpleasant news, for she was crying and in the greatest agitation. Though I understand Italian perfectly, she spoke so low and so rapidly that I could only hear that some one had arrived.

“My brother!” exclaimed Madame Rabenfels, and put out her hand as if for support.

She trembled from head to foot. I placed her arm in mine, and she moved on almost unconsciously, as it seemed to me, towards the house.

My presentiments were true. We were in what seemed the crisis of her fate—together! The dark sky stooped low over us, and held a pall as it were over both; the thick trees waved their branches around us, and united us in their embrace; the weeds over which we trod, and which continually impeded our progress, grasped at us as they would have linked us in one chain.

She did not speak. We soon reached the house. She still leant upon my arm, and I accompanied her up stairs. The landing-place of the stairs was a gallery into which several doors opened. One of these doors was suddenly and violently opened, and a man in the dress of a Roman ecclesiastic met us.

“I have come, Santa,” he said, but stopped when he saw me. He took her from me, looked at me from head to foot, re-entered the room he had left, and would have shut the door in my face I believe, but she recovered herself with an effort, and almost drew me in after her. Alas! she instinctively clung to the presence which was friendly to her.

“Santa—” he again exclaimed, and then paused.

“When did you arrive, Giovanni?”

“Shortly after midnight. I sent for Annunziata, and after a thousand subterfuges and lies, discovered you were out, and—”

“Here I am; but what has caused this sudden journey, and why did you wait for me? They would have prepared a room for you in a moment.”

“Your husband has sent for you—he has been dangerously ill—he is willing—” but he interrupted himself almost fiercely—“I do not think it necessary to include a stranger in our conversation. Is this Rupert Rabenfels? If so, I have a message for him also.”

“It is not Rupert Rabenfels; this is a friend. But I agree with you he should be spared this miserable scene which I foresee.”

She bade me farewell—her hand lingered in mine for a moment, it was as cold as ice.

As I slowly descended the stairs, I saw a woman seated on one of the steps, apparently in a convulsion of grief. It was the maid Annunziata. She started up as I approached her.

“My good sir, why did you leave them? He will kill her with his violence: she is so good—an angel—and to be *tribolata così—un vero martirio*—they are all devils, all of them—husband, brother, Rupert, all of them.”

A question rose within me—who is Rupert? but I suppressed it.

“Now that her husband is ill, he wants her.” And she sobbed with childish impetuosity.

I tried to console her. She suddenly started up.

“I will not let you go, till he has left her.”

She seized my hand and dragged me after her, before I could prevent her, through a corridor, up and down various passages, till she brought me into a small, dark room. To my surprise she closed the door, locked it, and put the key into her pocket.

“There,” she said in a breathless undertone, and moved slightly a heavy curtain which masked a door; the door was open, and to my horror—for playing the eaves-dropper was not my vocation—I found myself next to the room in which were Madame Rabenfels and her brother.

I turned away: Annunziata had seated herself on the ground, covered her face with her apron to stifle her sobs, and was rocking herself to and fro. If I tried to pass her she would be sure to make a disturbance, and thus create the difficulty I would have laid down my life to avoid. Yet it was terrible to become the secret witness of this scene, although there was a kind of fatal fascination in it, I confess. Two human beings of such strong passions and energies, struggling in what seemed a storm of fate, so much sorrow and beauty in one, so much anger and reproach in the other, and both giving free scope to their feelings with Italian eloquence and demonstrativeness, would have interested the most indifferent spectator. What must it have been to me, who felt my love (I had at last acknowledged to myself that it was love) was being tried there, as before a tribunal, to be dismissed as guilty, or acquitted as innocent? Was she married? Had she been divorced? Was she free? Their voices reached me distinctly as if I had been in the same room.

“Ferdinand will forgive the past.”

“Forgive—grant me patience;—do not mistake me for a moment, Giovanni; I stand where the condemnation or absolution of Ferdinand cannot

reach me. I throw from me that word forgiveness as a reproach."

I saw her erect, superb, defiant; she stood before him like a flame, thrilling with an indignation which words seemed powerless to express.

"Santa, you are mad."

"Not yet, Giovanni; I shall be driven so perhaps."

"A woman owes submission, obedience, humility to her husband."

"Her husband owes protection, love, fidelity to her. There is no tampering with these reciprocal duties. Think not I would make his broken faith an excuse, had I broken mine. Thank God, the evil of others has not produced evil in me—but how could I yield when I was commanded to sin? how could I obey, when guilt was enforced upon me? how could I humble myself when my husband had sunk into such an abyss of moral inferiority? Even in your tame interpretation of conjugal duties, there is a flaw here. Who was it exposed me to a perilous temptation, when I would have fled from it? Who sought to force me back to endure it? And because I would not swerve from my duties, abandoned me in the bloom and inexperience of my youth, to solitude, calumny, sorrow? Hear me, Giovanni, I will return with you, I will put a veil over the past—but do not talk of forgiveness."

"And Rupert Rabenfels?"

I saw her shrink back as if a weapon had reached her.

"Does your conscience speak there?"

My heart bled for her (writhing as I was with a sense of bitter impotent jealousy) when I saw her burst into a flood of tears and sink helpless into a chair.

"Did not your own words condemn you there? And since then, what has been your life? Instead of penance, mortification, self-denial, have you not led a worldly life, incessantly occupied with all which feeds the pride of the eye, the vain glory of the intellect, and the corrupt enjoyment of the senses?"

He looked round the room: it was sumptuously furnished, and bore striking evidence in its pictures, its statues, its books, its flowers, of the artistic and costly tastes of its mistress. "I have striven," she said, "humbly to fill up the void of my existence by the cultivation of tastes and powers for which I must render an account, and which you, Giovanni, in our young days, (have you forgotten them?) encouraged and cherished."

"It is no longer to my sister I speak," said the priest, brutally. "I have no ties with the world; I am of those who have forsaken father and mother, sisters and brethren, for God."

She started up (beautiful in her anger)—"Hypocrite! the God for whom you have forsaken your human ties, is ambition! Had I consented to gratify you and my husband by sinning against my own soul, you would not have broken your ties with your sister,—he, his obligations towards his wife; but," and her voice sank into an inexpressible mournfulness, "recrimination is of no use; you and I have drifted too far apart to be able to understand each other, but, after all, let us not

forget we are brother and sister." How did the tender, warm heart subdue the fiery spirit! I felt the moisture rise in my own eyes as I listened.

"You are prepared, then, to accompany me to Rome to-morrow?"

"To-morrow? No."

"Why not?"

"No matter" (faintly): "a day or two I must have—"

"You have partings, I suppose?" (contemptuously).

"Giovanni," said she, gravely, "you have insulted me long enough. Had not the same mother borne us, you should repent the longest day you live the words you have said to-night."

"Will you deny that Rupert Rabenfels is in Paris, and that you must see him before you go?"

Again she sank down on her seat, overcome, vanquished by that fatal name. "Oh!" she murmured, "to think that one human being can so torture another." There was a pause, then she spoke in a hollow, broken voice—"I must end this, I feel it is killing me. Yes, Rupert is in Paris—I must see him once more."

"Shameless, and yet you have denied!"

"I deny everything," she said, passionately.

"Yet you must see him again—and you said there was no love between you."

"I swear," she said, wildly, "by this sacred representation of our faith," she touched what looked like a casket upon the table, "that Rupert hates me even more than my husband does, even more than you do." There was such a piercing grief in her tone that her brother was silenced. "Now let us part," she said, "I need repose." She pointed to the door opposite to where I stood, and crest-fallen and subdued, the haughty priest left the room.

I waited only till the door had closed upon him, and lifting the curtain, had entered the room, and was at her feet almost before she was conscious of my presence. I poured out before her apologies, protestations, excuses for having overheard so unintentionally the scene between her brother and herself, offers of service, assurances of my admiration, reverence, and of my most respectful love. I could have said with Balzac's hero—"Je sens en moi le désir d'occuper ma vie à vous faire oublier vos chagrins, à vous aimer pour tous ceux qui vous ont fait ou blessée." I pleaded too earnestly not to be believed. Passion gave me eloquence—impulse—fire! My soul spoke to her soul and was understood.

I thought not of myself. May I not lay claim to a certain heroism in thus entirely ignoring, absorbed as I was in the impulse of chivalric devotion which stirred through my whole being and cast me at her feet, that the words I had heard that night cut up by the roots all the fond dreams of my love—Santa was married! my love, my suffering, my passion were vain. But, alas! not vain, if it were to be my privilege to serve her.

Annunziata had rushed in behind me, and with rapid words and more rapid exclamations, accused herself and praised herself in one breath, for the precaution she had taken of keeping me. Gradually I saw Madame Rabenfels' countenance soften and

relax from the set, stern expression it had assumed on my entrance. She gave me her hand.

"I thank you," she said, "from my heart for these kind words. I feel you are my friend. I am only sorry that this poor woman's unthinking affection for me should have detained you so long. I will now say farewell; but I owe to you, I owe to myself, some explanations of this scene; you shall have it. I will write to you. All women when accused assert they are more sinned against than sinning. God knows I am aware of sins which have merited and found their punishment; but the accusations which have been made against me are false, and the particular misconduct which has been attributed to me is the last of which I could be guilty. To sin is always to suffer; but, alas! to suffer is not always to sin."

Her eyes fell on the casket on the table: it was a small triptych. On the left-hand leaf was the Virgin and Child; on the right hand the Virgin by the Cross; in the centre an Assumption. There was a vague resemblance in the figure of the Virgin to the woman beside me. I was to be reminded of this still more a little later.

I left her. I had a fierce longing to carry on the struggle which was warring in my heart of hearts, in solitude. If it were defeat, if it were victory, I was best alone.

I am one of those natures to whom pain is an excitement. In battle I could have continued fighting, insensible to wounds, till, riddled through and through with shot, I at last dropped down dead. The very anguish I suffered as I looked on this woman whom I had so loved, and who I must love no more, made me brave. My words were no vain, false cant. I would have literally died to make Santa happy. The self in me was destroyed as a worm is crushed beneath an iron heel.

There was that about Santa which repelled at once and for ever the thought of a sinful love. No evil could enter precincts hallowed by her presence. Goodness and a kind of crystalline passionlessness were the atmosphere of her being, and influenced all who approached her. Santa might love tenderly, fervently, deeply; but passionately—in the usual meaning of the word—never. Looking at her, the union of virgin purity and a warm, all-embracing motherhood was intelligible.

From the moment her grave eyes had met mine, and she had said, "I feel you are my friend," there was no appeal possible. With the word "friend" she barred, as with a sword, the entrance into the Eden of Love.

CHAPTER III.

THE next evening, as I sat alone in my room in a tumult of feeling, I suddenly took the resolution of going to the Rue du Puits. I feared she might need protection, that the priest might follow her, that she herself, exhausted as she appeared, might require assistance; but under all these good reasons I gave myself for going, the real motive was the passionate longing I had to see her once again. Must it all end thus? Had her eyes met mine, had my hand touched hers, for the last time? Would that presence which had fulfilled

life for me never rise before me again? And yet what did it all avail? In a few brief days we should be separated, and perhaps for ever. The clocks, as they told the hour, had a mournful, funereal sound, and each time they struck my nerves I felt an acute physical pain. At midnight I went out. I reached the house. I rang: the porter admitted me, and I found myself in a small paved court. I walked boldly on. The faint glimmer of a lamp which swung across from wall to wall showed me where the stairs began. I ascended one or two and looked up. As well as I could pierce the darkness, I could make out that the stairs were in short flights, divided by landing-places on which opened the doors of the rooms of the several floors.

"I will wait," I thought; "if she be not yet arrived, I shall see her as she passes up-stairs, if not, I will wait till she comes down. If I have not courage to speak to her, her dress may touch me for a moment; in short, I shall be near her once more."

The house was a very noisy one. I heard a voice just above me, singing in a hoarse falsetto shrill tone a gay love song. It was a woman's voice, and grated on the ears; the words were so mirthful, the tone so despairing. I heard loud talking, and a noise of plates and glasses as of persons supping, in some other room. In one quite near me I could hear a child's sob, evidently crying from pain or illness, every now and then stifled, as if some manual check had been administered to it.

My sense of hearing became at last painfully on the stretch. I think I should have heard the lightest sound on the topmost stair.

I had thus waited about an hour, when suddenly I heard a step slowly descending the stairs in a faltering, hesitating manner. I felt my heart beat. There was a pause on each landing-place as if there was a difficulty in getting further. Suddenly, there was a longer one. I thought I had been mistaken in my apprehension, deceived in my yearning. I then heard a fall. I rushed up two flights, and there, at my feet, I saw a woman had fallen. It was Santa. She had fainted. I carried her down stairs, and knocked gently at the porter's door. Grumblingly he opened it; a bribe stopped his questions. I sent him for a fiacre and placed Madame Rabenfels on a miserable chair, the only one in the room. We were alone. I chafed her hands, loosened her bonnet, unfastened her mantle—but all seemed useless. She was as if dead. I was alarmed. I did not dare to send for a doctor, secrecy being evidently of importance to her. The time passed, I waited breathlessly—she had been insensible for hours—so long that the day was already dawning with a sickly light. The porter had returned with the fiacre, but had merely put his head in to announce it, and, muttering words I did not hear, had ascended the stairs and had not returned. The house was more quiet, but at times a bell had sounded and I had performed the office of porter, and pulled the string which opened the door. At last, with a few tremulous shivers, she shuddered back to life; the grey shadow passed from her face, and she opened her eyes with a forlorn, wandering, woful

look which I shall never forget. She did not move or speak, while I, as well as I could, put on her cloak and bonnet, but when I was preparing to lift her into the carriage, she asked in a faint, broken voice, the hour.

"Six," I answered.

She put out her hand. "It must be all over. I must go upstairs," she said.

"Impossible : you cannot stand."

"With you," she said faintly.

I could not oppose the pleading of that voice. Alas ! what right had I to oppose it ? We ascended the stairs. On the fourth landing-place she left my arm, and opened the door resolutely. It was a poor room, and I was surprised at first to see it full of light. Only for a moment. I could see, as I stood on the threshold, reflected fanwise on the ceiling, the seven luminous spots of light that shone from the seven lights below round the bed. On it was a corpse. I saw the outline of a figure, but a sheet covered it. A priest in the corner of the room was reading some prayers.

Madame Rabenfels had fallen on her knees beside the bed. After a while, she rose and uncovered the face. She stooped over it with a gesture and expression which would have convinced me at once and for ever, had I had a doubt left, that whatever mysterious tie might subsist between her and that poor clay, it was not the tie of guilty love.

At that supreme moment of sorrow there could be no feigning. No sister ever kissed her brother, no mother ever pressed her lips to the pale brow of her son, with more pure or more holy affection. She then looked round the room once more, and left it without a word.

I supported her in silence into the carriage. She sank back, and I could hear her weeping convulsively. I have never witnessed such tears : they were mingled with such sobs, such faint cries, such deep sad sighs. The heart must have been well nigh broken from which such a manifestation of grief* could proceed.

The carriage stopped at some little distance from her usual entrance into her house. I dismissed it. She would not let me accompany her farther than the door. She wrung my hand in silence, and entered.

Two days afterwards a servant brought me a packet and a letter. His mistress had left Paris. This, then, was her farewell ; that farewell is shrined in my soul. With the letter were enclosed some closely-written sheets which contained her history. I will transcribe it.

(To be continued.)

SANTA; OR, A WOMAN'S TRAGEDY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "AGNES TREMORNE," &c.



CHAPTER IV.

"I WILL tell you my history," she began, "and you shall judge me. You will find that—

Toute ma philosophie

N'est qu'un désespoir accepté.

"Till the age of sixteen I was as happy as a human being could be. I was an only daughter, and from some delicacy of constitution which required constant care, I was not sent, as usual, to a convent, but received a kind of rambling, desultory education at home. My father taught me to read, my mother to embroider, my brother to sing. I was much loved, and the indulgence I met with may perhaps have fostered my natural self-will; and yet, in the expansion which is so easy to a nature developed under genial circumstances, there is an advantage which outweighs all evils.

"I was sheltered, fostered, cherished, and I grew up to love, to confide, and to trust. I was proud, passionate, and impatient, but I was affectionate, truthful, and generous. I loved all around with the fervour of a warm heart and innocent nature.

"When I was sixteen there occurred a great misfortune in our happy home. My brother is ten years older than I am, and a circumstance I was then ignorant of caused a change in his fate. He met with a love disappointment. A beautiful girl whom he passionately loved married another man. That woman has been, directly or indirectly, the bane of my life. I never saw her, and it is strange to think of the evil I owe to her. She married a Sicilian named Serrano, and went with him to Vienna. This grief entirely changed my brother's nature. He became stern, morose,

severe, even to me. A total disbelief in the goodness and in the principles of women took the place of his former indulgence and kindness. He took orders as a priest, and in a few months his great talents, his fiery enthusiasm, and indomitable will made him recognised as one of the most promising young ecclesiastics of the Court of Rome. He became absorbed in politics. One of his favourite dreams was, to make use of the influence of Austria to deepen and extend the Papal power. He became personally ambitious; he seemed pleased at the promise of my beauty, and would talk a good deal of the necessity of a Colonna making a great alliance. It was about this time that his intercourse with political characters introduced him to the Austrian minister at Rome, the Count Rabenfels. He brought him to our house. Count Rabenfels was struck with my appearance, and, though thirty years my senior, did not hesitate to make proposals for me to my parents. My father and mother were pleased with my brilliant prospects. However unworldly for themselves, parents are often worldly for their children; but they left the decision to me. To me it seemed impossible, for the simple reason that to make any change in the life I had led hitherto, appeared out of the question. No other objection entered my head.

"I was free and light-hearted as a child. The manners, the appearance, the conversation of Count Rabenfels were all in his favour. He was so much in love that he entirely waived the question of dowry. He was so enormously rich that the few thousand scudi of a Roman girl's portion was immaterial to him. I do not know how far these advantages would have influenced my father alone, but when backed by my brother they became irresistible. His strong and pertinacious support of the alliance imposed it on my parents as a duty. He assured them that I myself would be grateful for having it enforced upon me. He said that my ignorance and inexperience were the only motives of my opposition. He talked to me, and as, after all, my objections were to the marriage and not to the bridegroom, it was not difficult to overrule them. I consented with some girlish reluctance and some girlish pleasure in the very natural gratification of giving pleasure to others. All were delighted; and I received as my reward the most submissive and flattering homage from the stately and dignified man, who was certainly then the most powerful personage at Rome. All my young friends envied me, and vied with each other in assuring me I was the happiest girl in the world. I was bewildered by the rapidity of the preparations for my marriage, and kept in a constant state of excitement. My brother never left me; he was kinder to me than ever. There was but one dissentient voice—that of an aunt—a sister of my father's, the abbess of the Convent of 'Le Vive Sepolte' in Rome.

"I was taken to receive her blessing, as was usual once a year, but the time was anticipated for this purpose on account of my marriage. She saw me alone. For some time she was silent. She looked at me fixedly.

"'What capacities for enjoyment,' she said,

'are here! and also what capacities for suffering! Child! is it too late to retract?'

"'I am to be married the day after to-morrow, dear aunt,' I replied; 'but why retract? Everyone is pleased, and I am happy.'

"'Are you happy only because they are pleased?'

"'Yes.'

"'Then you marry a man you do not love—poor, poor Santa!'

"I do not know what there was in her voice and in her look, but I felt the blood rise slowly to my forehead and a suffocating sensation swelled at my heart. In that oratory, vowed to penance, mortification and prayer, and by that austere woman, emaciated and worn down by fasts and vigils, the first veil was lifted which, till then, had concealed the mysteries of my being. The great needs of my nature rose apparent. I was psychologised as it were. I saw unutterable things—I heard unspeakable words; dimly the beatitude of love was made manifest. It was but for a moment. I was still kneeling on the cushion at my aunt's feet. She leant forward in her high carved oak chair, holding my hands and looking into my face. Deep under her brows gleamed her dark eyes, piercing yet sad. The story of a repressed life could be read there. A restless eagerness lay coiled in their depths; but round the pale, discoloured lips there was a great sweetness and repose, and the forehead though very wan was majestic in its calm. There might still be struggle and regret, but she had overcome. I did not at once analyse all this, but the impression made on me I shall never forget. I afterwards learnt, by a bitter experience, to account for and understand, the fierce, unsatisfied longing which was the Promethean torture of this wasted life,—that hunger and thirst for human love to which some are condemned.

"'Poor child,' she at last said, 'what a fate!'

"'But indeed I shall be happy,' I replied; and I looked round the room as if I would have said, 'You can scarcely judge here.'

"She smiled mournfully.

"'Santa! there are "Vive Sepolte" in the world as well as in the cloister. My youth, womanhood and age have been passed here. What I have suffered, God alone knows; and yet, at the very time when I suffered most, I knew there were griefs I should have found harder to bear. I have thought so much on this very subject—a woman's destiny. I have written many pages on it. When I am dead they shall be sent to you.'*

"'But now, my dear child, I must give you my gift, too.' She went to a small carved cabinet, and took out of it an old-fashioned ornament. It was a cross, anchor, and heart; but instead of the hackneyed motto of Love, Faith and Hope, inscribed on it in pearls, sapphires,

* I received a packet some years afterwards. I showed it to a celebrated French author, and it was published. It contains the most masterly and lucid exposition of woman's nature, position, and mission, considered physiologically, morally, and intellectually. There was too much boldness in it, in some respects:—too much hardness and severity in others. Still it was admirable; but written in too dry a style to become popular.—I. B.

and carbuncles, were the words—*Volere, Sapere, Ardere*, To will, to know, to dare. She clasped it on my arm, and then kissed my forehead and lips. 'I bless you, my child; remember my one counsel to you, is—*Be true*. All else is scarcely in our power—passions, temptations, circumstances, may overcome us; but there is one thing in the power of all—*Truth*.' She again looked me steadfastly in the face, and murmured: 'Both the shadow and the light—both the curse and the blessing are there. What a sensitive mouth, what a firm forehead! the eyes, too, are of that royal shape which contain so many tears.*' I never saw her again.

"I married. I had not been married three months, and was still surprised and confused by my new duties, when I lost my mother. She died happily, with her hand in mine, thinking she left me safely sheltered and protected. My father survived her but a week; they had been married thirty years. Her life was the mainspring of his; without her the machine stopped.

"It was while suffering from the sorrow of these bereavements that I began to awake to the cold, selfish character of my husband. At first he was politely sympathetic, but soon my continued dejection bored him. My brother was appealed to. He would come occasionally and preach resignation to me. I was disappointed in him also. I began to realise the hardness of his character. His views of life and the world jarred upon me. He and my husband talked in a manner that was entirely incomprehensible to me. All private ties or duties were ignored. Life was to be used for public and political purposes only; state intrigues were the aim of existence—expediency its principle. A dreadful loneliness seemed to grow around me. I began to feel like the child whose fairy gifts all withered in her grasp. A husband, a brother, a gay and brilliant circle of which I was the centre,—and yet I was alone.

"We went to Vienna about eighteen months after my marriage. I was nearly nineteen and in the bloom of such beauty as I possessed. My Italian face pleased. My manners were more impulsive and animated than was the conventional mode at Court, and I became the fashion. My husband was enchanted at the admiration I received, childishly so, as it seemed to me. It mortified me that he should seem to value me more, because others appreciated his choice. How much I had to learn!

"I used to rise early, and till our late breakfast read with avidity all which fell into my way. Music I was a proficient in, but books were a new treasure. I rarely saw my husband alone. He was engaged with his letters and despatches, and our conversation was usually monosyllabic. There was something arid and monotonous in this way of life. Sometimes a poem, a song, a picture would rouse me from my lethargy, and I had a brief vision of what life might be—but it was transitory. I would look at my bracelet and wonder at its signification.

"How can women will, know, and dare?' I would ask myself.

"I was as bandaged in mind as our Italian babes

* Chateaubrian i.

are in body; my perceptions were left free—but all my other faculties were dormant.

"I was a great favourite in the circle in which I moved. The highest personage in it looked upon me with a favour which placed me high in the admiration of all.

"One day, my husband informed me he was obliged to return to Rome. To my infinite surprise he said I was to remain at Vienna with his sister.

"Impossible, Ferdinand! I beseech you to let me go with you.' (I had still a childish regard and confidence in him.)

"It is impossible, *mon enfant*,' he said. 'I go for a very short time—it will be more convenient for me to live *en garçon* while at Rome. There, there, never mind; you must amuse yourself as much as you can here. Your poor husband has the cares of life, you see, but he leaves you its joys.'

"I looked steadfastly in my husband's face.

"There was an expression of irony he could not control! I must say he had not much of the hypocrite about him. I do not know whether he read incipient rebellion in my eyes; for he assumed a stern look, and said:

"It is my wish, Santa, that you remain,' and left the room.

"I was too timid to follow him, but my heart swelled as if it would burst. I had a vague sense of wrong, and yet what had I to complain of? I felt I must appear unreasonable and exacting.

"I did not again see my husband till that evening at Court. The Emperor was even more gracious than usual. He spoke to me of Rome, mentioned his intention of going to Venice and Milan, in short I saw I was more than usually distinguished by him this evening. I read it in the countenances around. I read it still more distinctly in my husband's face, as our eyes met, after a pause in my conversation with my sovereign. His eyes flashed with conscious pride, and rested on me, with a delight he could not conceal. Still when we retired, and he led me to the carriage, there was the same expression of irony on his face, that I had seen in the morning. The clever man of the world was, however, too clever. He did not understand the innocence and guilelessness of my nature. He thought my womanly vanity had been pleased at the homage I had received, and that I had already forgotten my wish of the morning. When we reached home, he said:

"I will now take leave of you. I go so early to-morrow that I should not like to disturb you.'

"Ferdinand, I entreat you to take me with you. I do not like being left alone.'

"Alone, when you are surrounded by friends and admirers! You had quite a triumph to-night.'

"I care for no triumph, but to please you. Let me go with you.'

"How beautiful you are!' he said admiringly, 'there is a power of expression in your countenance I have seen in no other—but you must be very prudent.'

"He took my arm: on it I wore my aunt's bracelet.

"'This is your motto,' he said. '*Volere, Sapere, Ardire.* It is a wise one, act upon it.'

"I threw myself at his feet.

"'Ferdinand,' I said, 'I beseech you, let me go with you.'

"'This is madness. Scenes are my aversion. I do not understand all this pertinacity and passion. It is my will that you should stay.'

"He raised me, placed me on the sofa, touched my forehead with his lips, and was gone.

"I was deeply wounded. I felt the indifference such conduct showed.

"Two months passed. I led the same life as hitherto, I was not unhappy. I enjoyed the diversions usual to my age; but there were times when I asked myself. 'Will this go on for ever? Does life afford nothing higher, greater, more absorbing?'

"My success at Court increased daily. I was more and more drawn into its most intimate circle. My husband's sister accompanied me everywhere; but accidentally, or from design, I was always left alone, the centre of some charmed line of demarcation at all Court festivities, which set me apart from all but one. That one showed me a kindness which I had the folly to mistake for a real honest regard. My inexperience, however, delayed the catastrophe.

"I was not one of those women who can play with love, and accept it from any man who offers it; who take possession of a life as they would of a jewel, to wear or cast aside, and as long as they preserve a personal fidelity to their husband, fancy they do no wrong. I had dreams of something different from the calm sentiment of affection which hitherto was all I had experienced or inspired; and hoped that my husband would some day see in me more than the inexperienced child he had married for her beauty, and would learn to love me as I felt I could love him; but I sought nothing else. The love now offered me had no characteristic by which I could recognise it as the passionate emotion of which I had dreamed. It was simply pleasant. A sentiment, not a feeling. My tastes were sympathised with and understood, my opinions consulted, and I had that delightful consciousness that the best construction was put upon all I did and said, which gives a woman so much security, and doubles whatever power of charming she may have. I said to myself. 'It is sweet to have a friend.' The exalted position of this friend mingled my gratitude with a feeling of reverence (I had been educated in the most old-fashioned notions of loyalty), which gave an exaltation to my manner which was at last misunderstood.

"It was one evening at a masked ball to which I went as Night, crescent on head and bow in hand, that the declaration, which had been probably predicted by Court gossips for more than a month past, was made. A mask hovered about me for some time, and then drew me to a conservatory which opened from the ball-room. It was the Emperor. He threw aside the careless light tone he had hitherto accustomed me to, and confessed a passion which had enough of truth in it to knock loudly at my heart. I had never till then heard that voice. Yes, I felt I was

loved, though I did not love. It was bitter-sweet!

"'Why do you look at me so searchingly?' he said; 'I ask for nothing but the simple assurance that I am not indifferent to you—my great love will sooner or later win a return. Beautiful and beloved, answer me.'

"I started. I felt I had forgotten myself in a strange musing to have allowed this to go so far; and to his infinite surprise, for I saw it in his face, I neither blushed nor faltered, but knelt in my turn, I gravely kissed his hand, and laid it on my forehead (such was the custom at this Court at an audience of farewell), and then I rose, and without a word left the room. He had understood me, and sprang after me.

"'Where are you going?'

"'To my husband.' And then, seeing the mortification and pain of his countenance, I added, 'Forget, as I have already forgotten.'

"The next morning by sunrise I was on my way to Rome. I travelled day and night. At length the great Dome rose before me in the purple sky. O Patria! It all seemed like a dream.

"The carriage drove to a house in the Corso, where my husband had an apartment. It was evening; through the half-closed windows I could see lights. He was at home. I went upstairs. In the ante-room I met and recognised the German valet who was always in his service. He started back as if he had seen an apparition.

"'Immediately,' he said, 'his Excellency should be informed of my arrival. But will the Countess come this way; my master is at dinner with some friends, but he will be at liberty immediately—will your ladyship come into this room and rest.'

"He showed me into a very sumptuous bedroom. Through the open doors I saw the drawing-room brilliantly lighted up, beyond was the dining-room. I threw myself on a chair and waited. Why did not my husband join me? A sound of loud gay conversation, tinkling glasses, and quick exclamations reached me through the closed doors. It was a convivial meeting evidently, and not one of the most refined character.

"At last Ferdinand entered, he looked annoyed.

"'Santa, what is the meaning of this?'

"I did not care for his coldness. In my youth and innocence I felt a sense of protection and confidence in my husband's presence, and in his home. I threw myself into his arms, I told him all. He started up, walked up and down the room with impatient exclamations in German, and at last drew me to the light, and looked at me from head to foot. His face cleared up.

"'Listen to me,' he said, gravely. 'I will forgive you, on condition that you return home to-morrow;—home, then, was not with him.—'I will accompany you as far as the frontier.'

"'But—'

"'Do not answer me,' he said, imperiously. 'Take some refreshment and repose, and be ready to start at six.'

"'Ferdinand,' I said, passionately, 'have you understood me?'

"'Pahaw!'

"I looked into my husband's face; it was flushed. He had evidently taken a great deal of wine. He would not have spoken with so little caution under other circumstances. He was excited, and my sudden arrival perplexed him. I was so inexperienced that the shock of finding my grave distinguished husband one of a bacchanalian circle dispelled my illusions about him at once. He was cast down from his pedestal for ever. The reaction from almost childlike respect to almost profound contempt was so great, that I was more indignant, more impetuous than I should otherwise have been.

"I wrung my hands.

"'Nonsense, I abhor scenes; you must, you shall return.'

"'Never.'

"'Are you mad?'

"'I will not return.'

"'Your vanity has turned your head; you speak treason, and you think treason—return, you shall.'

"'You shall not force me back where my honour is perilled.'

"'Your honour is my honour.'

"At these words the door was opened gently, and a woman with fair face, and blonde hair streaming in ringlets over her uncovered shoulders, small and light as a fairy, glided in. I knew her face. She was an actress whose name had been often coupled with my husband's, before his marriage.

"'What is all this, Ferdinand?' she said; 'the coffee is cold. Excuse me,' turning to me, 'I did not see you;' and turning to him, asked in a low voice who I was.

"Before my husband could recover the vexation into which this apparition had thrown him, I was gone.

"'I understand him now,' I said, and drawing my mantle round me, was down-stairs and half-way to the old Palazzo on the Palatine Hill before I again drew breath. The storm of passionate indignation with which I rushed through the moonlit streets of Rome had no grief in it. It is a sad awaking to real life, when an uncontrollable sense of wrong gives us the measure of our being. Like all persons of strong imagination, however, I somewhat exaggerated the wrong, and gave it a premeditation which was false. I imagined I had been left in Vienna purposely to free my husband from his conjugal duties, and that this woman was the cause. The truth was, I was left in Vienna because it was foreseen that my influence with the Emperor would become paramount. The Emperor himself had wished it—for I was too much in the habit of clinging to my husband for him to find it possible to make any impression on me, while the one I was always watching and thinking of, stayed beside me.

"My husband had not the deliberate villany of wishing me to be the Emperor's mistress. He had a certain faith in my principles, but he hoped there was enough of a coquette's instinct in my nature, to lead me to encourage, flatter, and profit by the feeling I had excited, without succumbing to it. How many women do this daily! It was

friendship. And in the name of friendship a married woman can give herself so large a margin, she can take so much and give so little, if she be virtuous (virtuous, God help me!), that he anticipated the realisation of his most ambitious dreams through the Imperial favour bestowed on me. He was more contented, however, to be absent during this comedy, though it was to be performed '*en tout bien et en tout honneur*.' On returning to Rome he met with a former love, and had compensated to himself for his enforced celibacy by enjoying a great deal of the society of his bachelor friends and connections. I was not, however, jealous in the common acceptation of the word. I cared nothing for that blue-eyed little fairy. I would not have wronged her for worlds; but the door of my heart was closed against my husband for ever!

"My brother's astonishment, when he saw me enter the room in which he was writing was extreme. I trembled from head to foot as I related to him what had happened. He listened to me thoughtfully. He saw that my pride, my sense of right, my self-respect had been outraged; but that this was not a grief which had cut at my heart-strings. He knew—he knew, alas!

"He was kind. A room was prepared for me, my own old girlish room, and I was left to repose.

"What emotions of regret, tenderness, foreboding overcame me as I recognised the old familiar objects, the simple furniture, the faded tapestries. Eager, ardent, and impulsive as when I had last slept in that bed, what a world of thought, and what a difference of position separated me from the girl who had knelt before yonder image of the Virgin, and slept on this couch. I sobbed myself to sleep.

"I heard afterwards that my brother had sought my husband, and remonstrated strongly with him—on what? That he had not remained with me at Vienna, till my favour had been consolidated, my savage prudery softened, my girlish straight-lacedness corrected. Both the Churchman and the Ambassador, the brother and the husband, were prepared to take advantage, in the furtherance of their own selfish aims, of the magic wand which the poor beauty of the wife and the sister was to have proved.

"The next morning they both sought me. I was calmer, but I was steadfast; to Vienna I would not return without my husband.

"'You must remain here, then.'

"'Never!' I said.

"'Never, Santa?'

"'Never. I should be disgraced—slandered—betrayed.'

"He bit his lip.

"'You will not return to Vienna—you will not stay here?'

"'I will return to Vienna with you.'

"'After this escapade I should be disgraced, I think. Listen to me,' he said, and he talked fast and eagerly for him; 'your vanity and inexperience have led you to make mountains of mole-hills. The Emperor admires you, so do many, why should they not? Why should I grudge your smiles to others, when your heart is mine? The influence you would have obtained by a

simple and innocent acceptance of the homage offered to you (I say homage, nothing more), would have served us all; a feather's weight has often turned the balance in which the destinies of nations have been weighed, a smile from you might have consolidated a line of policy which we statesmen have worked years to initiate.'

"Again that look of irony passed over his face.

"There was something dreadful to me in these cold-blooded allusions to all I held sacred.

" 'Then you do not love me, or care for my love?'

" 'You have a great deal to learn. This is not a question of love. I leave you at Vienna with my sister, and you make us all ridiculous by this flight to Rome. Your conduct will give rise to all sorts of suspicions and scandalous interpretations. You must return, or we shall be the laughing-stock of the whole world.'

" 'The world! Is there nothing else?' I answered, as I looked in his face, with a last appeal, 'must the world be always between us? do you aspire to nothing higher than court favour and influence? Is love nothing?'

"His countenance changed.

" 'Child!' he said, sadly, 'I should have known you twenty years ago. It is too late now.'

" 'You must decide,' interrupted my brother.

" 'I have decided.'

"For two hours they combated my resolve; I was firm. At last my husband's anger rose beyond all bounds.

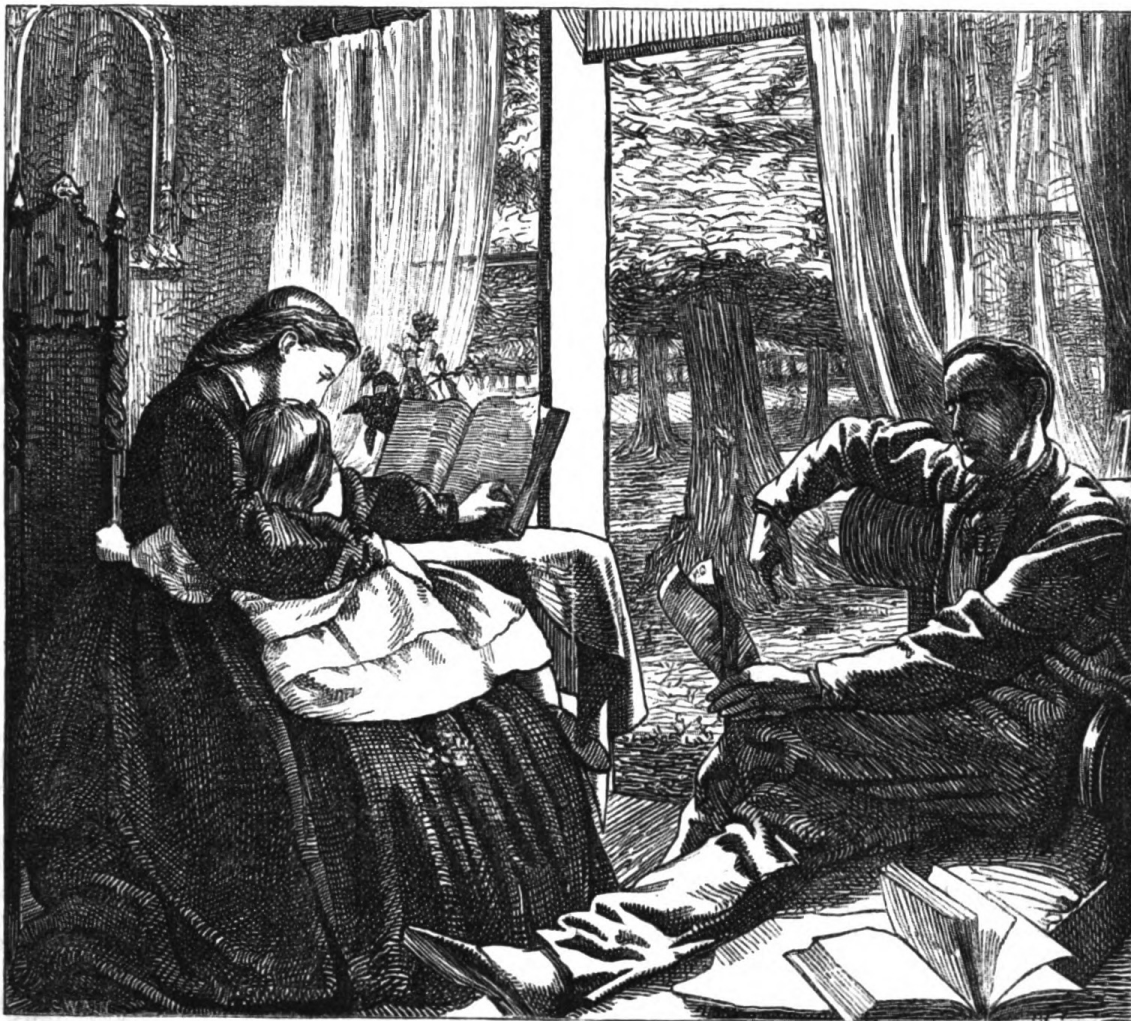
" 'Be it so,' he said, 'you will not stay here, you will not return to Vienna—there is only one other alternative. I have an aunt, the Chanoinesse Landsberg, who lives at Schloss-stein, eighty leagues from Vienna. She will receive you gladly. You shall pass the summer there. When you are tired of the retirement, write to me that you are willing to obey my wishes, and all shall be forgotten.'

"My brother approved. Defiance rose within me, but I was silent. In a few hours the carriage came; my husband handed me in, and bade me farewell. I have never seen him since."

(To be continued.)

SANTA; OR, A WOMAN'S TRAGEDY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "AGNES TREMORNE," &c.



CHAPTER V.

"FOR ten years I lived with the Chanoinesse Landsberg. My life was as monotonous as could well be conceived. The Chanoinesse was infirm in health, and was obliged for weeks to be alone. Here was a melancholy page in the history of woman. Here, however, is not the place to relate it.

"Both pride and inclination prevented me from making any steps to return to my husband. I was immovable in my resolution. I would not return to Vienna without him, and I told him I considered our separation a final one. After a while he ceased to urge my return. My face was forgotten at court, and he remained in Rome. I gave myself up entirely to study; I read, I wrote, I improved myself in every way. I did not repine at my lot—but I felt there was a want—I passionately thirsted for happiness. I used to wake at night and find the tears rolling down my cheeks; some sweet, seductive dream had beguiled me in sleep. I had not found out that, after all, my sorrow, my joy, my life itself, was a selfish one.

"Matured in mind and body, I was still as inexperienced as a child. I could have discussed the deepest questions on the most recondite subjects, yet a peasant of twenty, who had loved and held a child on her knee, was more versed in the mysteries of the soul, and had more really developed her being than I, whom Rupert Rabenfels called a Muse.

"As I approach the most painful event of my life, a dread comes over me. I fear to disturb the memories of the past, lest I should come upon the calcined heart among the ashes. My greatest error and my greatest sorrow are here.

"Rupert Rabenfels was a great nephew of the Chanoinesse Landsberg, and a nephew of my husband's. The son of a brother who had died young. In the event of Count Rabenfels leaving no heirs, Rupert was his heir. An entire difference of education, tastes and opinions had divided uncle and nephew. I had never seen him at Vienna; but, during the first years of my residence at Schlosstein, he came occasionally to visit us. He had married very young, and had lost his wife.

Three years after my arrival he brought his little motherless Ida, his only child, to stay with us. A most friendly feeling had always existed between Rupert and his 'aunt,' as he termed me, during these brief visits, but nothing more. During my first enjoyment of independence, I had occupied myself so entirely with studies, that books were the realities of my life, and persons took a very secondary position with me. But, after the first six or seven years, I became wearied, and, as I said before, I yearned to love and be loved. The arrival of this lovely little creature was a boon to me. How very happy it made me! How ceaselessly I watched over her and tended her in all her little childish ailments. She was a very delicate child. I have watched night after night beside her bed; I have held her in my arms for hours when no other place gave her repose; in short, I lived, moved, breathed but for her. When I rose in the morning I devised some service for her by which I could consecrate the day; when I closed my eyes at night, it was with the remembrance of her dear face asleep on its pillow, charming my last conscious thought.

"About this time I received a letter from my husband—a letter which should have touched and softened me. It prayed for my return; it expressed the most unqualified regret for the past, and offered love, devotion, happiness, for the future. I was inexorable. I said I could not and would not forgive. I said that with will, knowledge and courage, a woman could live alone. I should do so. Friendship would console me for the privation of love, and I had friends at Schlossstein whom I had elected and chosen for myself, with whom I had cast my lot, and I should abide by them. I do not think I should have been so hard, had it not been that I felt it impossible to leave Ida. The strongest feeling of my nature, a capacity for maternal love, was called out for the first time, and I was resolved to indulge it to its full extent.

"This was the turning-point of my life. Rupert was staying at the Schloss at the time. He saw me thoughtfully perusing the letter. The Chanoinesse told him my husband wished for my return.

"He looked eagerly up, and his dark face flushed.

"'You return?'

"'No.' I paused.

"'You are happier here?'

"'Yes, with Ida.'

"'But Ferdinand would allow you, I have no doubt, to take Ida back with you. He seems so sincerely anxious to make you happy,' said the Chanoinesse.

"'Excuse me,' interrupted Rupert, 'no child of mine shall ever live under the same roof as Count Ferdinand. Ida stays here.'

"Those words settled the question. I could not, would not part from Ida. I was as wrong in this resolve as I had been right in the determination of preferring a solitary, dull, but safe home at the Schloss to a luxurious, flattering, perilous one at Vienna. My sense of having been right there, blinded me to the wrong here. The retribution for this act of self-pleasing—this refusal to fulfil a

positive duty—was, as you will see, not long delayed.

"The Chanoinesse ridiculed me without ceasing for my love for Ida. She was one of those positive persons who would place limits to everything. As Ida was not my own child, my immoderate love for her seemed unnatural. What cared I? I let her talk, and held Ida only the closer to my heart. Ida had been with us two years when a few lines from Rupert told us that he was coming for a visit of greater length than usual. He had met with an accident, and thought he had lamed himself for life. He came for rest and to recruit his strength. The Chanoinesse was indignant. She suspected the most extraordinary motives for this visit, though she never approached the right one, but could not avoid receiving him. I was jealous for Ida's sake, lest he should withdraw some portion of her love for me; otherwise I looked forward with pleasure to the arrival of an inmate who would have more mental sympathy with me than I had hitherto met with.

"He arrived. My love for his child was a great tie between us. He and I were naturally thrown much together. We differed entirely in many opinions, but our tastes were alike. Personally, perhaps, no two persons—both handsome—could have pleased each other less; nevertheless, we were attracted to each other.

"It was a peculiarity in my fate that I was always thrown among ambitious people; my husband, my brother, and now this Rupert, who possessed more ambition than anyone I ever knew. At first, however, I was only aware of it as the aspiration of a noble nature. He studied me narrowly, and did me the honour to think I could be of considerable use to him. His keen eyes perused my face and watched my gestures. He listened to my conversation, he read to their depths both mind and heart, and saw exactly how he could 'exploiter' both. I must say, however, not from selfish motives entirely.

"He belonged to one of those secret societies which have so long existed in Germany, Italy, and France, who work together for the redemption of nations. His indomitable industry, his cool intellect, his powers of physical endurance, made him one of its most valuable members. It was in an expedition in its service that he had met with the accident which had lamed him. When he arrived he was almost helpless. There was something peculiarly touching to me in the equanimity with which he bore the pain and the privation which it imposed. A strong healthy man, in the bloom and pride of youth, condemned to months of inactivity, naturally appealed to my womanly compassion. During these months I devoted myself to him. Ida would play round the couch on which he lay, while I nursed him as I had nursed her; or she would sit on my knee with her soft cheek against mine while I read to him.

"For the first time I met with an intelligence which could direct, deepen, and stimulate my own. Rupert soon found that I possessed certain powers which would be useful to him, and he hesitated not to make use of them. A certain ruthlessness, I find, always takes possession of those engaged in secret plots and conspiracies. It is possible that the

inadequacy of the means to the great cause they propose to themselves, obliges them to be somewhat unscrupulous, in the use of them. In my lonely life I had cherished dreams such as all Italians cherish. The independence of Italy, its restoration to its place in the scale of nations, its social regenerations, were watch-words to me. I listened to him with avidity, and with an ardour which delighted him. I worked at his bidding for the cause to which he had devoted himself. I laboured in a manner which surprised him. We were always together. I confess, to my shame, that between the care of his child, ministering to his own helplessness, and assisting in the arduous correspondence, plans, designs, &c., which occupied him, I saw little or nothing of the Chanoinesse. I neglected a clear, plain duty for a Quixotic one imposed by myself; but the self-indulgence which thus veiled itself in an appearance of self-sacrifice, was punished as it deserved.

"Rupert had a dramatic facility in assuming any character which answered to the ideal formed in his own mind, of what he ought to be on any given occasion. This differed according to his mood or his purpose. He could be all that was gentle, refined, and tender, or all that was hard, cynical, I might almost say brutal; but the *griffe du tigre* was not at once perceived by me *sous la patte de velours*.

"Nothing at first, however, could be gentler, more like a brother in his relations with a loved and trusted sister. Such an influx of affection as I drew, first from Ida and then from her father, was a boon which to me, who had led hitherto so isolated and unloved a life, seemed inestimable. I was lifted at once into a region of warmth and light out of frozen darkness. The injudicious affections of women are often blamed. Blindness, and a moral perversity of choice, are imputed to us, when our love is fixed on an unworthy object. This may be true in the sense of love proper; there, a personal instinct ought to adjust the moral balance, but in a maternal or sisterly love the rule fails. We love the creatures God has placed near us, and the love itself is such a noble expansion of our whole being, that the merits of the being so loved are transfigured. As the poet says—

Who cares to see the fountain's very shape,
And whether it be a Triton's or a Nymph's
That pours the foam, makes rainbows all around?

So was it with me. My love for Ida seemed to be increased by my love for her father; my love for Rupert flowed into and exalted my love for his child. I was the companion of both, and towards both I felt a mother's yearning. It was the purest, sweetest, most unselfish feeling of my life. With what joy I found the gift in myself, the capacity for such a love. A man who possesses what he has supposed hitherto to be a barren estate, when he sees the first glimmering of the ore which proclaims a gold mine, may have a similar feeling. It seemed almost fabulous that such a felicity should be mine. I, who was childless, had a child—I, who was brotherless, had found a brother.

"Santa," said Rupert to me one day, 'if this

life could only continue, what great things we should do. Two such forces, (is not mind a force?) acting in union, might move a world.'

"Why should it not continue?' I asked.

"He scrutinised my countenance keenly.

"How totally unlike your sex you are in everything! Above it or below it?' He muttered the last question, but I heard it.

"Above it by all means,' I answered, laughingly.

"Have you never loved, Santa? Has love never knocked at that self-sustained heart?'

"Love never knocks at a door which is closed. It must be open for him to seek to enter.'

"My answer was a quotation from a favourite book.

"Never! Shall you never love?'

"I shrunk back.

"I would have loved my husband; as it is, I seek nothing henceforth in life, but a friend's hand to hold—a child's brow to kiss.' I stooped to Ida, who was standing near me, and clasped her in my arms.

"Another day he asked me if I did not regret my gay life in Vienna.

"Regret? when all my nature there was dormant, and here is developed. I have exchanged emptiness for fulness—barrenness for wealth. A friend, a child, whose love can fill my heart—a noble cause to serve—what need I more?'

"Again the same searching look met mine, and seemed to read my heart.

"What a golden friendship I dreamed of! so secure did I feel, that the insurmountable obstacles which divided us would give stability and security to our affection, and place it on a height above all the fever and transitoriness of passion. I dreamed of being the friend of Rupert here and hereafter;—of loving his wife, should he ever marry again, of cherishing Ida as mine, of following from my retirement his brilliant and successful career, of receiving occasional visits from him and his, in the far future years, which would be the Sabbaths of my life, and give him repose after the fatigues and labours of his. Fool, fool, that I was! His heart was too cold—his principles too wavering, to be capable of steadfast feeling or enduring affection.

"His nature ignored all affections but one. He could enjoy a kind of 'camaraderie' with many, but this was all inspired and enjoyed by the head, the heart was capable but of one sentiment. Madame Serrano, my brother's first love, whose beauty and witchery had increased with every year, had inspired him with the only emotion of which he was capable. A sentiment which she irritated in every way; fed, but did not satisfy; encouraged, but did not return. It was to be near her that he came to us. She had taken a house in our neighbourhood. She was the most accomplished coquette in the world, with a soft suggestive manner which every man could interpret as he liked best. She was not deceitful, but she had that sympathetic organisation, and that strong inherent love of pleasing, which gave her power to invest herself, at the moment, with the character which was most attractive to the one whom she wished

to please. I heard a great deal of her from Rupert; he and her husband were first cousins, and though I was directly opposed to her in character and manner, conceived a great admiration for her. I believe she was, in truth, a gentle and amiable person; that to seek to win the love and admiration of all, was as natural to her as for a flower to turn to the light, and I am quite certain she did not measure the wrong she did. She imagined that he could limit himself to the harmless feeling for her, which she entertained for him, and which their relationship sanctioned. She could not conceive the bitterness of the unsatisfied longing she excited. It was like a child playing with gunpowder, but the explosion did not injure herself. Had she only deprived me of Rupert, I could have joyfully forgiven her, but with Rupert I lost my Ida!

"I am speaking of all these things, however, with the lucidity which after-experience gave me. At the time—though I had a confused and mystic apprehension of evil—I had moments and hours of exquisite happiness. No human beings can develop themselves without being the happier for it. Growth is the most felicitous condition of humanity. 'Yes,' I thought, in my proud foolish heart, 'now my life is as it should be. I have linked it to a public aim, and I have scope for those energies and abilities, which equally belong to both men and women. My heart is rich in the affections I have chosen for it. If all women could know, will, and dare, they would be free and happy. Why abide by the fate chosen for us when we were too young to choose for ourselves? Development is the duty of all.' So it is, but not a one-sided development. With the mind, the soul should grow; and I had forgotten that the human soul can only develop in conformity with the will of God. For our mind's sake let us give free scope to the artistic tendencies we may possess; but side by side with this is the plain duty, to know mercy and walk humbly with God.

"There was, however, an under-current of discomfort and mortification in this life. I was continually receiving anonymous letters, in which I was, by turn, threatened, accused and warned. In these letters, I was told, I was considered in love with Rupert;—it was proved to me that all suspected it, and that he himself was careless who knew it. It was pointed out to me that however confidential and intimate our relations might be in private, in public he lost no opportunity of slighting me, and showing his want of respect and esteem for me,—that my husband was aware of my conduct, &c. I would tear up these letters, generally, with great indifference and contempt. Some, however, struck home. They were artfully managed, and with a knowledge of both Rupert's character and mine, and the arrows reached their aim.

"Like all persons who are much absorbed in themselves, Rupert was peculiarly neglectful of little courtesies and ordinary conventionalities. For any advantage to his secret pursuits he would not have hesitated to ask me to do the most extraordinary things. We often sat up all night in the library, writing, discussing, making out

accounts. I have ridden thirty miles from the Schloss at a late hour (I was a practised and intrepid rider) to bear some message or give some letter for emissaries, bound on various errands,—traversed Italy, France and Germany, in every direction. My pride—the greatest fault in my character—had certainly been offended by accidental neglects, which were probably unintentional on his part, but which cut not the less deep. Sometimes I would expostulate severely; he would answer carelessly, and that was all. Except, however, for these trifling vexations, my life was a paradise, for Ida was blooming into health and beauty at my side. Yet I was conscious that a few grains of dust had accumulated between the leaves of the book of friendship we held between us. The book itself was soon to be cast aside.

"The Chanoinesse was unsparing in her comments. She disliked her nephew, and was jealous of my affection for him. She did not understand it. She was not cognisant of the political secret which bound us together, and, judging from externals, thought I was losing myself from pure benevolence.

"My dearest Santa,' she would say to me, 'I tell you, beware of Rupert! I know him; he will throw you aside when he has done with you.'

"No, dear aunt, he has a true regard and affection for me; besides, what of him? Let him leave me, Ida—I ask for no more.'

"True regard! true fiddlestick! He is not capable of friendship for a woman. He may deceive himself in thinking he has a friendship for a woman he loves, but he has no feeling whatever for a woman he cannot love; and you, Santa, are a woman he never could love—you are antipathetic to him, I can see.'

"I laughed.

"Personally, perhaps; but I am quite sure we have strong mental sympathies, and what does it signify? I have no wish but to be his friend. Were it not for Ida, to whom as a woman I can be of more service than if I were a man, I should wish to be a man for Rupert's sake, I could help him more. I would rather be his brother than his sister, for instance. But, after all, it matters little, as affection like ours is sexless.'

"Dear Santa, I feel sure that you are sexless in his eyes from his want of personal attraction towards you, and from the very uses to which he puts you, but I am not so sure seeing the strong affection for him which is impressed in all you do and say, that he conceives that he is sexless in yours.'

"I started up.

"You are entirely, absolutely wrong. Under ordinary circumstances such a mistake might be made—men are vain and women are imprudent—but I cannot believe that any man of Rupert's experience would fall into such an error. If not error, it would be the excess of baseness. Listen to me,' I said, and I held both her hands and looked into her eyes, and made her look into mine; 'I do not pretend to much heart experience, my life has been a peculiar one, but I am quite sure that in love, properly so called, there is a timidity, a consciousness, a coquetry, as different as

possible from the frankness, the transparent unreserve, the careless ease of friendship. I should as soon have thought of adorning myself to look well in my own eyes or in Ida's, as in those of Rupert. Every woman in love is a coquette with the man she loves. And what is the sin of the coquette? That she wears this expression for several, and gives a promise she does not intend to fulfil. After such an intimacy as ours he must suppose me the worst, the most shameless, or the most foolish of women to imagine such a thing for a moment. He knows me too well.'

" 'You think so ; he may appreciate the powers of your mind, he may be aware of your vehement, impatient disposition, he may like your cheerful temper, your demonstrative nature, which knows neither reticence nor art, but he will never understand your soul. Some men can never understand some women. They have no standing point from which they can measure them. I tell you—Beware, Santa !'

CHAPTER VI.

" A FEW days after this I heard a conversation which shocked me. We had a few guests staying at the Schloss ; the Chanoinesse was ill ; I had done my best for their entertainment. Rupert was absent on a visit to the Serranos. Now he had somewhat recovered, his absences were frequent, but Ida was usually left with me.

" 'They seem a very happy *ménage*,' said one lady to another who had a large family of daughters, and had been disappointed that one was not Rupert's wife.

" 'It is shameful of the Chanoinesse to permit it,' said another. 'A woman separated from her husband—quite a revolutionary, strong-minded woman—to occupy a young man like that, the heir of this magnificent property ! She might obtain a divorce and marry him.'

" 'Their studies are of a kind—'

" And the silence was filled up, I imagine, with the most expressive gestures of disgust.

" 'She is handsome,' said a man, 'but is not a woman to my taste.'

" 'One of those women who wear us out or themselves. However, Rupert tells me—'

" They passed on, and I heard no more.

" I was shocked ; not so much, God forgive me ! at the accusation, as at the idea that Rupert had spoken about me to that man. I smiled at the notion of my being distasteful to him. I suppose no woman in the world has cared less for pleasing for pleasing's sake than I. Kindness I could give to all, but I was too pre-occupied to lay myself out for the sake of winning attention. The only beings one can please without seeking to please are children ; their unconscious instinct always directs them unfailingly to those who really love them. All children liked me. Ida loved me with all the warmth of her little heart. My child ! my child !—for so she was, if there be truth in love or devotion. How the wound of our separation bleeds still, and will bleed for ever !

" I was grave as I went home. My life had already borne fair blossoms never destined to ripen into fruit. I had seen how my filial, my

sisterly, my conjugal love had all perished : either they had fallen from the tree of my life, rudely torn down by the storm of death, or nipped by the frost of life, and I began to tremble for what remained ; but here surely was fulfilment. These could not fail me. I was wrong. I was to be stripped bare of all, that I might expiate my folly and presumption, in choosing my own path, in neglecting the duties which belonged to me, to take others which were not mine. My heart was to be emptied, for I had poured away the bitter draught of isolation which God had given me to drink, and I had refilled it with a sweet but pernicious liquid, from an alien source. I had swerved from a positive duty, and presumptuously taken on myself others for which I was not fit. The alien path I had chosen was as full of briers and thorns as the one which had been allotted to me ; moreover, it led to an abyss.

" I mentioned nothing to Rupert on his return. I felt a little chilled towards him. He may have thought me captious, but he was cuirassed against all impressions from me. I had not the power to pain him ; besides the sponge was not squeezed dry, and could not yet be thrown aside. He had senses and a brain, he had a nervous irritability which gave him the appearance at times of intense sensibility, but there was a sterility in his heart. His whole career has borne the impress of this imperfection on it. All things find their level. Men may be successful, but if there be a want of heart in themselves, their very success wears the stamp of this failure. But alas ! why do I talk of failures, whose whole life was a failure ?

" Soon after this time I was made anxious and unhappy by the illness of the Chanoinesse. Always suffering and ill, the flickering flame was now about to expire. She increased in tenderness for me, and I felt pained to the heart in thinking how often I had neglected her. Rupert was continually absent now, and we were left much together.

" 'Oh, Santa !' she would say tenderly to me, 'I wish I could know you sheltered from the storm that I see coming. The shadows are drawing darkly over the sky, and my death will be the signal for the tempest to fall. You have given your gold for copper, your flowers for thorns—you have held out your hand to give support to another, and you will be cast away yourself.'

" I wondered afterwards if she had had any communication with Rupert. I soothed her as well as I could. She went on :

" 'I know you better than you do yourself. You enjoy little things intensely, you have such a vocation for happiness, that sorrow is more keenly felt by you than by most. You place yourself in antagonism with it—you wrestle with it as with a mortal foe—and you think you will overcome it ; but even if you do so, you will remain wounded, maimed, mutilated.'

" 'I know I am not patient,' I said ; 'it is right I should be taught patience.'

" God knows the tears of months were to teach me that lesson. I am delaying the catastrophe—my heart beats as I now write, with the dead, dull pain which came upon me then, and has never left me, since I knew I was to see Ida no more !

(To be concluded in our next.)

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BY THE AUTHOR OF "AGNES TREMORNE," &c.



CHAPTER VII.

"ONE day, after a silence of many months, I received a letter from my husband. Reports against me had reached him, and the long thirst of vengeance which, as a disappointed courtier, as a baffled man of the world, as a mortified husband, he had amassed against me, gave themselves utterance in an epistle which was a masterpiece of polite insult. The coarsest insinuations were veiled under the most polished irony. A letter which sent the hot blushes to my forehead, and the scorching tears of indignant shame to my eyes: I was literally maddened. The letter concluded, by informing me that henceforth we were strangers—that a small yearly sum was at my disposal—that Rupert Rabenfels, whose home I had shared for a twelvemonth, would probably provide me with one in future; that by himself and my brother, I was repudiated and disowned.

I instantly wrote to my husband that I accepted entirely and without reserve the position he had made for me; that it was true that Rupert Rabenfels and I, had been nearly a twelvemonth under the same roof, that which had sheltered me when cast off by him; that we had been hitherto, and I trusted would be always, friends; that besides the Chanoinesse, he and his child were the only relatives I should henceforth acknowledge. I despatched the letter immediately. I did not hesitate one moment. With reckless impetuosity I flung myself on the sword with which I was menaced.

"I went out in the cool evening to a spot which was a favourite of Rupert's and mine. He was still absent, I believed. He had taken Ida with him on his last visit to Madame Serrano, and neither had returned as yet. As I walked down the sloping lawn, and kept under

the shadow of the trees which skirted it on one side, I thought not of aught which had chilled my friendship for Rupert, but that the happiest moments of my later life had been spent with him and his child. I recalled the past months, during which I had not thought a thought, wished a wish, hoped a hope, which was not in some way connected with Ida, and my heart melted with yearning tenderness over both. I longed to hold Rupert's hand in mine, and tell him how much I valued these only treasures which fate had left me.

"I reached our favourite spot. It was a bank which hung steeply over a brawling stream. Seven cypresses stood together on the highest point, and beneath them a rustic bench had been placed on which I now sat down to rest. The view of the green fertile plains backed by the 'terrible purple' of the mountains was exquisitely beautiful. It was spring, and the grass at my feet was fragrant with violets and jonquils. The half-melancholy, half-enchancing mystery, with which all nature struggles into life, was filling the air with unutterable sweetness. My excited feelings were softened into calm; I felt contented; for me, also, life was not all winter,—there might be spring for me, too. Was not Ida a gift from God, to comfort and console me. A blossom to make vernal my hitherto frozen life?"

"The Serranos tell me you go in a few days," said a voice below. The cypresses sheltered me, and I saw Rupert, and a man who belonged to the same secret society as he did, and whom I had seen occasionally at the house, standing in the path just below me.

"Yes, I go in a week."

"Why do you sigh so deeply? Madame Serrano thinks you have wasted your time here quite long enough; as she does not know your occupations, she considers, naturally enough, that Madame Rabenfels has an undue share of your society. I know she has persuaded you to leave the Schloss, and stay the rest of the time with her. But how will Madame Rabenfels receive this intelligence?"

Rupert muttered an oath.

"Poor Madame Rabenfels, she will miss both you and your child," continued his friend.

"Pshaw! If Helena wishes it, it is enough. She makes it a point to retain Ida. How can I refuse her? No one has such a right to my devotion."

"Really you are unintelligible."

"In heaven's name, are you mad?" said Rupert, "or do you wish to drive me so? What am I to Madame Rabenfels, or Madame Rabenfels to me? We are friends of course—I have a great many friends; but surely friends are left every day. The fact is, I should not have returned at all had not business obliged me."

"The Chanoinesse is dying, then?"

"Yes, poor woman, I believe she is. The house is miserable in consequence: it is like a tomb. I shall be glad to get away. This sort of life suited me while I was disabled; but since, it has been the greatest bore; the first day I put my foot in the stirrup, about a week ago, I was resolved it should not last, and my aunt's illness

has expedited my departure. I am sorry for poor Ida, though; for she will miss her home here and her aunt."

"Madame Rabenfels has been of very great use to her, to you,—indeed I may say, to all of us."

"Yes, she is a woman of great intelligence and powers of application. I soon discovered that, and made use of it accordingly. I came here to be near the Serranos. There had been a little coolness between us which I could only get over by seeing them constantly, though not at first under their own roof. My visit here has served two purposes. I have worked most diligently with Santa's help."

"And you and the Serranos are more intimate than ever. The affair has been well and cheaply managed, I must say. You may smile and shrug your shoulders, but it is the fact. Poor Madame Rabenfels!"

"Qui plus y perd, plus y amis."

Rupert laughed as he uttered this quotation from an old French song.

"Is the rumour true, that instead of leaving her fortune to you, your aunt leaves it to Madame Rabenfels?"

"It is: she only bequeathes the Schloss to me."

"I am sorry."

"Nay, I care not for myself, and I am well pleased that she leaves it to one who will serve our cause, and who has been like a daughter to her."

"Besides which, you are sure to be her husband's heir; there is no chance of a reconciliation in that quarter: I have taken care of that, by informing him of this free-and-easy life at Schloss Stein. The interpretation which was placed upon it by all who witnessed it, he is informed of through me, and I am quite sure that his large fortune will help our cause. He will never see her again, and at his death it will be yours."

Rupert sighed. Did he, remorseless as he was, feel a little conscience-stricken at this cold-blooded villany? It matters little; he listened to these infamous words, and acted as if they expressed his own sentiments.

"To say the truth," went on his friend, "Madame Rabenfels is a woman I dislike. She is antagonistic to me in every way. Some persons praise her simplicity and intelligence. I could never discover anything in her but a certain hardness and force of character and will, which I supremely dislike in a woman. I can imagine her obtaining a great influence over some people, but I confess I always breathe more freely away from her; no woman should place herself so at war with the conveniences of society as she does."

Again Rupert sighed. His friend pursued:

"What will you do with your child? Had you not better leave her at the Serranos? And then her belongings can be sent after her."

"Yes, I think I shall do so."

"You will thus get rid of a scene: women always make scenes at parting. Have you any idea what Madame Rabenfels intends doing?"

"None: but see, the dew is falling; let us go home."

" 'Stop, let me light my cigar.' "

"I sank slowly down on the grass : how long I remained I know not : the stars were high and bright in the sky when I was conscious again. I staggered as I rose, and was as weak as if, after a twelvemonth's illness, I had risen from my bed. We hear of broken hearts, but that is a fable. My heart was wounded to the core. The wound is as fresh now as it was then—but it is not broken. The event of Rupert's departure was in itself nothing, but the few careless words with which he threw away a friendship which should have been lifelong, gave me the measure of his indifference, and gave me an insight into his character. To part me from Ida, and Ida from me, was as cruel as it was unnecessary. It was not, however, cruelty, it was simply the thoughtlessness of utter selfishness. Though my intelligence had always seen the faults in Rupert's self, my heart had refused to acknowledge or realise them in Ida's father. We are told we should trace in the lineaments of the present sinner the future seraph—those lineaments which exist in all, however faintly the outline may be preserved. I had certainly done this with him. I might compare the operation of my love for Ida on my estimate of Rupert's character to the effect of a stereoscope on a photograph—of itself, a cold flat portrait, but when we look through the glasses, we see the same picture rounded into living beauty. It is a deception, we know, but through these glasses we can never see it otherwise.

"How shall I describe what I felt? I was alone. The life which had been so rich a few months back, and which might have been so still, for nothing need have been altered, even though Rupert's absence was necessary, was now an entire waste. The whole was an illusion. I had no longer a brother, a child. In truth I had never possessed them. Had this been a love disappointment, pride would have risen to my aid. I should have trampled it under my feet, and have stood strong, even on the ashes of my soul. But if the babe a mother has been nursing on her breast, were suddenly to change into a serpent and to sting her, would not a mother's cry be heard? Where would be the pride then? I had so little that I was anxious to find myself in fault. I scrutinised myself severely, and found, of course, that I had not been perfect, but my faults had been like grains of sand in the great sea of love with which I had surrounded Rupert and his child. How diligently I sought to blame myself, seems quite foolish now. Had he and I stood for one moment, in an equality of position, I could have borne up bravely; but I, I stood where I had been before, and where I should always be, for he had never loved me, and I had lost nothing; it was he, who had cast away an affection for him and his, which I had a mournful conviction he had not and could never inspire again. It required circumstances, as peculiar as those in which we were placed, to call it into being. If you stood with one you loved beside a precipice, firm and steadfast yourself, but he held only by your hand, what would be your feelings, if in sheer wantonness he threw your hand aside and sank down before your eyes? I knew that Madame Serrano, with all her

gentle blandishments, with all her delicate allurements, was not capable if able, or able if capable, to hold him up for a moment—she might fall with him, or separating herself from him, give impetus to his fall: she could do no more. To Ida she was entirely indifferent. She had children of her own: she had not that yearning towards a child which I, the childless and worse than widowed, had so long suffered from, and had so gladly satisfied, by holding Ida to my heart. For himself, also (though in a far less anxious manner), when I reflected on his future life and the many arid scenes of toil before him, linked as he was to a great, but perhaps hopeless cause, I trembled, but what availed my help now. Yet I had given it, unselfishly, honestly, faithfully; many a week in which Rupert had regained the light-heartedness of his earlier youth, cheerfulness unusual to him, a buoyancy of heart and mind he might never again experience, attested this.

"With this fatal love at his heart, even if free, how could he hope to find in another marriage, the happiness that his first had deprived him of. He had no heart with which to win a bride, and yet the parental affection which was his, as the sun shone on him without his yea or his nay, he closed his eyes to, and shut out from himself and from his child.

"I had a sufficient knowledge of the human heart to perceive that nothing is so odious to a man who loves one woman, than the fulsome love of another who would be a rival to her; but there was no challenge or emulation here, the territories of friendship and love are so wide apart. Love is not robbed because Friendship is enriched. Men do not forsake the ties of blood because they love, and my love had all the spontaneousness, but none of the exigencies, of a blood relationship.

"I know that a rose-leaf dropped into a lover's hand by the one he loves, outweighs the sacrifice of a friend's whole life; nor do I blame this, for

"Love should still be lord of all."

I did not feel aggrieved at any preference of love over friendship. In my younger, happier days, I too had dreamed of love: a love which like light in a lamp, would give flame to my whole being, which should glorify me into beauty, exalt me into genius, sanctify me into goodness; but I had long known that this consummation of happiness was not to be mine in this life, and I could fancy I understood why. I had a latent capacity for happiness, which, had it received its full satisfaction, would have made me feel immortal; if I had tasted of that fruit, I should have dreamed, I could not know death! My affection for Rupert had none of the elements of love in it; there was no appropriation in it; I never sought his sympathy; I was content to give him all mine: I knew his life throughout; and as to me, he knew and sought to know as little of my past, as if I had been born the day he arrived, and cared as little for my future as if I were to die the day he left.

"As soon as I reached the house I went to Ida's room. I threw myself on my child's bed, and buried my face in her little pillow. Indignation, resentment, disappointment, despair at the separation from Ida, compassion for myself, were all sunk

into a stupefied sense of misery, added to by a feeling of my own utter helplessness and the overwhelming cruelty of my other sorrows. My husband's bitter words returned to me. There seemed to be, in truth, a league against me of the powers of darkness; but the only distinct idea I could frame, the only articulate sound I could murmur, was 'Ida, Ida.' What was the use now of will, knowledge, and courage? I covered my face with my hands and prayed for patience, submission, faith. Suddenly a thought struck me. I rose from the bed; I went into the drawing-room. By the open window stood Rupert alone. The moonlight fell on his face. He looked pale. I went up to him.

"Leave me the child, Rupert," I said gently.

"Had I broken in upon a love dream, that he started back with an expression of such astonishment, almost of fear?

"Impossible!" he said, and left the room, but before he did so, my heart spoke out to his. He was stung to the soul, and never forgave me.

"What that night was—what were the following nights I passed for many a long month—I shudder to think of. Rupert left a few days afterwards; he could not even await his aunt's death; he was alienated and relentless to the last. A great flood had flowed between us; on my side, of the deepest sorrow; on his, of insurmountable aversion. I believe, firmly, that the very sight of my pale face, the silence and gloom which covered us both, as with a pall, were odious to him. There is something, I suppose, exasperating and irritating in the sight of the grief which is caused by one's self; yet how could I help it. I was hurt, and I bled; I had been struck, and I was bruised; I was wounded, and the gash was visible. The bitterness lay, perhaps, chiefly in the feeling that the whole had been a counterfeit. My weaknesses, as well as my qualities had been studied and made use of. The use was over, and I was cast aside without remorse. It was not an enemy who had done this, but my own familiar friend. No promise had been broken, no love betrayed, but the staff on which I leaned had shivered in my grasp. The tower I had built on the desert waste of my life, had as little foundation as a child's pack of cards. A breath had blown it down. Men and women do not play equally at this game of friendship. The initiative is never in our power. The veto is rarely left to us.

"He left with a few conventional words of ordinary good will, and so we parted. At first I suffered intensely, for I was bereaved indeed; but slowly the light dawned upon my soul that I had deserved all this; the fault was mine—a thousand times mine. I had been mistaken, Quixotic, besotted. I bowed my head in acceptance of sorrow.

"A few weeks afterwards the Chanoinesse died. She bequeathed the whole of her large property to me, with the exception of the Schloss, which she left to Rupert. As there was a probability of his return, I made my preparations and left Schloss Stein.

CHAPTER VIII.

"An impulse led me to Paris. In Paris there is so much to cure one of morbid self-contemplation.

To make the best of my fate—to endure it in its length and breadth of privation—was my study. No resentment lived in my heart but regret, self-reproach, and self-condemnation. Towards Rupert my feelings were as little personally hostile as the patient's towards the instrument, by which he suffers amputation. To him it had been given to act the Nemesis towards me, but the faults that deserved that Nemesis were mine, not his.

"My life was spent in writing, reading, serving the cause to which I had bound myself. Of Rupert, I never heard; our lives had dropped entirely apart. I had written several times to my husband; my letters were unanswered. My position, like all exceptional ones, invited calumny. Much could be written on the injustice of society in this respect; but until the whole education of women is reformed, so that their tastes, principles and habits are modified, I cannot wonder at the suspicion with which they are looked upon when they assert their independence. When we think on what principles they are guided in the selection of a husband, is it surprising that, alienated from him, they are supposed incapable of standing alone? There is more justice even in this world than we suspect. A true life always obtains the victory in the end.

"One day as I was returning to Paris after a fête champêtre, and driving through a part of the city I had never passed before, there was a crowd assembled, and the carriage was stopped. I sent my servant to inquire the cause. A cart had driven by; the horse had become unmanageable, and in its furious plungings and rearings, had knocked down a man who was passing. I told my servant to offer his assistance. He obeyed, and the next minute my own horses, impatient at the restraint, became suddenly ungovernable, and kicked in the most frightful manner. A charitable bystander opened the door of the carriage and assisted me out. I told my coachman to turn back, and find some bye-street which would bring him to a neighbouring point where I could meet him, and I then tried to find my servant. This brought me into the midst of the crowd; and there, supported by two men, his eyes closed, and his cheeks white as ashes, I saw Rupert Rabenfels! The circle had been run—we met again. I went up to the men who supported him, and asked them where they intended taking him. They shrugged their shoulders.

"One said, 'We will look in his pocket and see if he has a card with any address, if not, we must take him to the hospital.' There was no card, but a pocket-book, on which was written a number and a street. 'You had best take him there, first,' I said, with a calm voice. They obeyed me: at the same time a few francs to a commissioner brought back my carriage. We drove to his house; the porter recognised him. His room was on the fifth floor, and he was carried up and laid on his bed.

"I sent for a surgeon, dismissed the men, and was left alone. After a while I looked round the room for some trace of Ida. There was none. Rupert was evidently alone. He must have been sent on some mission by that secret society to which he belonged, and which was as imperious as the Order

of Jesus it its demands. It must have required the strictest incognito, and there was nothing in this poor room, with the evidences of daily labour in it, that could excite suspicion. At last the doctor came. He feared congestion of the brain from the fall and the blow; but was, on the whole, hopeful. For three days and three nights Rupert was delirious. Strangely enough his child's name never came to his lips, but very often in thick, gasping accents that of Madame Serrano.

"At last he opened his eyes, and out of their dim and sunken pupils came a look of recognition.

" 'Santa,' he said. There was no hesitation; a little distrust, but no surprise. It seemed natural for him to find me there.

" 'Are you better?'

" 'Thanks! But what is it? How is all this? You are very good,' he said, and I saw a blush rise to his temples.

" 'Where is Ida?' I asked.

" 'Ida, she is safe.'

"And then the past seemed to rush back upon him.

"From the day I found him, I had been cold and calm. It was a fellow-creature requiring assistance, and I rendered it as impassively as a Sister of Charity. He was silent, but his countenance assumed a great expression of pain. I rose and prepared to leave him. I told him I would send some one to attend to him, but during his delirium I had thought it best to remain myself. He thanked me absently.

" 'Before you go, would you kindly open that desk,' he said, 'and give me two letters which are in it? It is of consequence they should be destroyed in case anything happens to me.'

"I went to the desk. The first thing which I saw was a miniature, which I recognised at once. It was a portrait of Madame Serrano. The painter had given the soft, beseeching smile of her witching lips. Beside it was a little sketch of Ida. At the sight of this, I felt the floor sway to and fro beneath my feet; but, with an effort which sent all the blood to my heart, I took out the letters, closed the desk, and bade adieu to Rupert. He expressed no wish to see me again.

"On reaching the street I sent my servant for a fiacre, and went home well nigh broken-hearted. I could only call upon God, and shudder like a wounded animal under my pain.

"Pain! pain! pain! How mysterious it is that in the great ebb and flow of humanity one human being can have so great a power of torturing another. How infinite is that power, and how ruthlessly is it sometimes wielded? God help us! when, in the future world, we see what we have done, when the hearts we have wounded, and perhaps maddened, by our unkindness, are laid bare to us!

"I had not been dragged, however, through all this suffering without some fruit to my soul. I had too often gone over the fateful past not to have it written out as in a map before me—where I had erred—where I had been to blame; and if weak human nature revolted and said, 'Not from thy hand, Rupert, not from thy hand should come the

punishment—spare me for thy child's sake!' my contrite and broken heart said, 'Oh, God! not my will, but Thine be done!'

"To overcome evil with good, and that at the price of any self-sacrifice, was now my enduring object. I went again to see Rupert. The consequences of the fall were different from what was expected. The brain had not suffered, but the whole general health was prostrated. The shock had produced great weakness, and he had broken a blood-vessel. He could not be moved, partly on account of his health, and partly on account of the rendezvous this miserable lodging was to men engaged like himself.

"I should never have known all this, unless after some days' struggle with myself before I could face the suffering of another meeting, I went to see him. The first glance at his face was enough. Rupert had not long to live. He knew it also.

" 'I am glad you have come,' he said; 'there are some things I wish to do, and no one but you can help me. But the pain I endure obliges me to take opium. I am by day utterly unfitted for everything; about the evening I revive. There is another reason. Our companions come to me separately for a few minutes daily at the end of the day; I have to draw up a report of their progress and labours. These are secrets which I can trust to no one but you; do not be afraid of the hour, which you must make as late as possible. At certain distances you will be watched over by two of our associates, who, in different lodgings and in various streets, live in this vicinity. I would offer you an escort, but this might be of more disadvantage than benefit; and besides, it might be safest for your reputation—with a sneer—to have a defender in the worst streets, in case of necessity, instead of one and the same companion through the whole length of Paris.'

" 'I am glad to serve you and yours,' I answered simply.

"I went every night. He maintained a distant, aggrieved manner towards me. Once or twice I spoke of Ida. I besought him to let me have her.

" 'To be taught to hate her father! No! Remember you told me you despised me.'

"I threw myself on my knees,—I entreated, I implored him. To have snatched away that child from the fate which would be hers, a poor orphan in this hard world, gave a frantic energy to my prayers. He would not hear me, and turned so pale that I feared the discussion would kill him.

"Twice did I try with the same result. My generosity seemed an offence towards him. It placed him at a disadvantage, and he rejoiced that a revenge was still in his power.

"Two nights ago I went to Rupert for the last time. I finished what he wished to have completed. He was dying, but there was a strange light in his eye as he followed my different movements. When all was put in order I approached him.

" 'Thanks,' he said; 'and now farewell.'

"He held out his hand.

" 'Farewell! I cannot leave you yet, Rupert.'

" 'Yes, you must leave me,' he said, distinctly

and firmly; 'Madame Serrano will be here to-night; I must see her alone.'

"I stooped down; I kissed his death-cold forehead and obeyed him. You know the rest. That night my brother arrived. The next night I went—Rupert had died alone! Madame Serrano had *not* arrived. When the servant went in the morning to see him, he found his master was dead.

"I have dwelt on these things to prove to you how little a woman's life can be judged either for good or ill by the world in general. It was not headlong passion, but presumptuous self-reliance, which has been my bane. That part of God's will which particularly concerned me, submission to a solitary and unloved life, I had revolted against, and the whole scope and result of that period, in which I was the servant of my own desires, was a proof of this. A life which has not its root in obedience to God, may be fair and apparently healthy, but it has no vitality; it is like those nosegays which the Florentine flower-girls offer you in their green Cascine, and which look brilliant and blooming, but each flower has been cut close to the blossom, and fastened on a dry stick, and it fades and perishes immediately. You may deduce this moral from my life. One can solve the enigma of human destiny with one answer alone—Resignation. When the human will unites itself, in obedience, to the Supreme and Divine will, from struggle is obtained victory, and it enters at once, according to Bossuet's magnificent expression, among the Powers of God.

"You see, my friend, for friend you are, I am different from what has been thought of me. My life, like that of many women, bears a strange resemblance to this memorial which I send to you to keep for my sake. It is a triptych, painted by Francia. Outwardly, it seems nothing but a jewelled case, as are often the prosperous externals of our conventional life. You open it. On one side is the 'Virgin and Child,' on the other, the 'Virgin by the Cross.' How often has it made me think not only of the wondrous mystery of our Redemption, but (not profanely let me whisper it), of woman's fate also. So do we all bear a love in our hearts, or on our bosoms (let us call it what we will, love, friendship, motherly, or sisterly love), a pure, childlike, immortal love, born, as we deem it, for the most god-like destiny; and, alas! how often do we not also stand by, and see it, when full grown to man's estate, crucified, dying, dead? The third phase, the centre, the glorified fruition, how few attain! I go to Rome to my duty—it is a forlorn hope—as such, I shrink from it less. But whatever may be my future fate, I will not forget your kindness. My life is, and has been, sufficiently lonely, for me to prize its few pleasures. There is so much to be done, to be learned, that I am less unhappy than you think.

"I know one thing, certainly, that if I were to die this instant, and meet Rupert face to face, before God, my affection towards him would need no purifying change. There is a consolation to me in this thought. Would I could feel as clearly innocent towards others. From the beginning my life has been wrong. I have been pure in thought and deed, and yet how erring. Submission to the

will of God, patience in bearing trials which had been inflicted upon me, resignation, were all wanting. We can never be truly happy, till we learn to be content with unhappiness. To will, to know, to dare, is but half our duty in this world. To yield, to forego, to endure, complete the circle. The laws of society are at fault in much that affects the destiny of woman, I know—and when these laws are brought more into conformity with good sense and true religion, the fate of women will be externally happier; but the war we all have is not so much with the foes without, as with that deadliest foe within ourselves, the Self of each. We ought not to seek to embroider the tapestry of our lives according to our own will, but according to a divine pattern. I was right to choose my self-imposed exile, in preference to the danger of sin; it was not right afterwards to refuse to return to my husband. I have been humbled to the dust, and I may now do better.

"I am writing to you alone, and with this letter concludes the second phase of my life. I shall often think of you. Every good, every evil hour, before it passes away, digs its own grave, and prepares its own mourner. I will remember you always, and it is well for me I have known you. I have had a greater faith in the unselfishness of human nature since. But I must now close this record of faults, errors, and sufferings. I would say judge me leniently; {but no, judge me truly. Proud Spirit be still, strong Heart surrender, impatient Will, learn to endure!

"Let me hear from you often. Our lives flow in such different channels that absence will gradually produce its usual effect. Believe me, you will change. But you have touched me too nearly in one of the fatal moments of my life, not to retain a place in my grateful regard. I shall still continue to serve the cause to which Rupert bound me. It is a holy one! Farewell, and God bless you."

What I felt on reading this letter may be imagined. I loved her, and have loved none since.

Three years later, I received a packet from Rome, addressed to Walter Seymour. It contained the bracelet. Under the word *Volere* was inscribed, in small letters, *Rinunziare*—under, *Sapere, Obbedire, under Ardire, Soffrire*. Santa Rabenfels had died in Rome.

Many years have passed since then, and I have lived through the grief which then bowed me to the earth; but her memory is not wholly submerged beneath the sea of my present life, its priceless pearl is an ever new treasure and delight. I think of her, I think I see her, I fancy I hear her speak, and my life is evermore enriched by the unspeakable boon of having known and valued her. From her I have learned the widest indulgence for others, the severest judgment for myself. When I hear women condemned, slandered, belied, I throw myself into the breach to defend them. I remember her,—like her they may be innocent, like her they may have been wronged. When my heart would weep tears of blood, when I think she is dead, and that one of the noblest of God's creatures was cut off ere her sad incomplete life had apparently found its fulfilment, I correct myself. There was

an imperfect rhythm in her life here, which could be harmonised into melody in the immortal life alone.

(Conclusion.)
